

Mountains in Micah and Coherence: A “SynDiaTopic” Suggestion

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With recourse to some relevant postmodern sensibilities—especially the pertinence of peripheries and the value of plurality—this article examines the occurrences of mountain(s) in Micah with a view to highlighting the tension between the abstractness of space conceived of with a single center and the complex pluriformity of places that it overwrites. The work proceeds in two movements: (1) a syntopic (contra synchronic) reading that builds on the ancient western Asian worldviews of space, and (2) guided by theories of critical spatiality, a diatopic (contra diachronic) reading that highlights some peripheral details that contribute to the Mican vision, paving the way for a “syndiatopic” suggestion.

I. PRELIMINARY MUSINGS

Mountains matter. They tend to linger long in the mind of even a passing viewer. The biblical mountains seem to have been no less awe inspiring. The spatial visions of the Hebrew Bible—situated mainly in the Syro-Palestinian landscape, which is marked by two mountain ranges—include numerous occurrences of mountains.¹ Any effort to articulate a coherent biblical vision of “the

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¹See S. Talmon, “הר,” *TDOT* 3:427–47, here 433: “Two great mountain ranges cross the region from north to south, the one to the west and the other to the east of the rift valley. . . . The great difference in altitude between the low coastal region and the even lower rift valley, reinforces the impression of a majestic size associated with mountains in the OT literature.”

mountain” has proved to be challenging.² The Mican embrace of mountain(s) is no exception.³

Mountains appear at several junctures in Micah.⁴ At the threatening theophany, they melt (1:4); in the context of Zion, plowed as a field, the Temple Mount is reduced to a wooded height (3:12); then, to the raised mountain of the LORD (4:1–2), many nations march and the everlasting kingship of the LORD is established on Mount Zion (4:7); later, mountains also appear as covenant-controversy hearers (6:1–2); and, in the final rendition, they seem to point to the farthest boundaries (7:12). Dissimilar depictions such as these appear to add to the oft-attested, challenging task of viewing this prophetic corpus as a coherent whole.⁵ It is proposed here that a spatially sensitive reading would point in a profitable direction. Two questions therefore are in order: Why space?⁶ And what is spatially cued reading? But first, a brief note on the relevant postmodern perspectives is appropriate.

²In the *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, ed. Leland Ryken, James C. Wilhoit, and Tremper Longman III (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2010), 572–74, s.v., “Mountain,” mountains are grouped under three broad categories: (1) As physical places, the functions of mountains vary from serving as boundaries (Josh 15:8–12) or places of vision (Deut 34:1–4), while remaining wild and nearly uncultivable (except for planting vineyards; see Jer 31:5). (2) In the poetic imagination, the immensity of mountains is commensurate with God’s own power, and yet they can quake and melt at the same God’s anger (Ps 18:7), can leap (Ps 114:4, 6) and sing (Isa 44:23). (3) As sacred sites, mountains are settings of encounters with God or appearances by God.

The various meanings of הַר, in *HALOT*, s.v. “הַר,” include: (1) hill-country (Gen 31:21; 1 Sam 31:1); (2) an individual mountain; (3) mountains around Jerusalem (Ps 125:2); (4) mountain of a god: 1 Kgs 20:23, 28; Pss 2:6; 68:16; Isa 2:2; 11:9; 14:13; 56:7; 57:13; Ezek 20:40; 28:16; Obad 16; Mic 3:12; Zeph 3:11; (5) as a place of illicit worship (Deut 12:2; Jer 3:6).

³The focus of the present work is limited to the explicit occurrences of “mountain(s)” (הַר/הַרִים) in the book of Micah. However, “hill” (גְּבֵעָה, 4:8), “hills” (גְּבֵעוֹת, 4:1, 6:1), “high places” (בְּמוֹת, 1:3, 5), and “high places of woodland” (בְּמוֹת יַעַר, 3:12) belong to the same semantic field and, where appropriate, will be part of the discussion. For a list of synonyms of mountain(s) (הַר/הַרִים) in Hebrew Bible, see Talmon, “הַר,” 430–31.

⁴The list here envisages how a reader encounters mountain(s) in a sequential reading of the book of Micah from the beginning to the end, which is one of the many meaningful ways to approach this minor prophetic corpus.

⁵Continued scholarly debates characterize the question of Mican coherence. Kenneth H. Cuffey helpfully presents the debates chronologically (1900–1965 and 1966–2013) and thematically (*The Literary Coherence of the Book of Micah: Remnant, Restoration, and Promise*, LHOTS 611 [London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2015], 6–72). While Cuffey leans toward literary coherence, Mignon R. Jacobs points to the redactors’ role (*The Conceptual Coherence of the Book of Micah*, JSOTSup 322 [Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2001], 227).

⁶Theoretical insights into *space* and *place* are diverse and continually evolving. For a helpful survey of key theorists and their views, see Phil Hubbard and Rob Kitchin, eds., *Key Thinkers on Space and Place*, 2nd ed. (Los Angeles: Sage, 2011). Further and as Fábio Duarte helpfully observes, *space*, *place*, and *territory* are polysemic and polemic concepts. Although they are interdependent, they are not interchangeable (*Space, Place and Territory: A Critical Review on Spatialities* [New York: Routledge, 2017], 1). While detailed discussions of these concepts are beyond the scope of this article, the focus on space here is (1) in contradistinction to time (hence the choice of syntopic

When postmodern sensibilities⁷ appeared on the interpretive horizon, with an attendant “incredulity toward metanarratives,”⁸ they ushered in an awareness of the presence and relevance of plurality, which, in turn, highlighted the value of peripheral narratives and spaces. The same awareness granted a rightful hearing to hitherto minor details and marginalized voices.⁹ In other words, instead of prioritizing time, history, and metanarrative, the complexity of space became a locus of attention. Further, within the spectrum of space, the critical spatial theorists have emphasized the need to pay special attention to marginal/ized spaces.¹⁰

Guided by these spatial emphases, I will proceed in two movements. Taking a cue from Gert T. M. Prinsloo’s delineation of ancient West Asian spatial schema,¹¹ the first move focuses on how Micah presents the mountains, in a rough correlation with the general thematic flow of the book. In other words, the first move is about the (literarily) shaped mountains. The second move, guided by critical spatiality, turns to minor details that are at the margins of those portrayals. Together, the two moves help (1) highlight how the chosen spatial vision of mountains may aid in

and diatopic) (2) the trialectics of space (see Lefevbre and Soja) and its emphasis on (3) the relevance of marginal/ized spaces and voices.

For a study that foregrounds space in the Hebrew Bible, see Luke Gärtner-Brereton, *The Ontology of Space in Biblical Hebrew Narrative: The Determinate Function of Narrative “Space” within the Biblical Hebrew Aesthetic*, BibleWorld (New York: Routledge, 2014). See also Zhenshuai Jiang, *Critical Spatiality in Genesis 1–11*, FAT 2 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2018). On spatial reading of the New Testament, see Eric C. Stewart, “New Testament Space/Spatiality,” *BTB* 42 (2012): 139–50.

⁷A. K. M. Adam describes them as “textures of postmodernism” (*What Is Postmodern Biblical Criticism?*, GBS [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995], 1–26).

⁸Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, Theory and History of Literature 10 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), xxiv.

⁹Feminist, womanist, postcolonial, new historical approaches are some of such notable interpretive endeavors. For a recent clarion call on how interpretive endeavors need to attend to the marginalized, see the SBL presidential address by Adele Reinhartz, “The Hermeneutics of Chutzpah: A Disquisition on the Value/s of ‘Critical Investigation of the Bible,’” *JBL* 140 (2021): 8–30, <https://doi.org/10.15699/jbl.1401.2021.1b>.

¹⁰On this, the Foucauldian notion of heterotopia is appropriate. It reiterates that “the perceptions of space are always non-perceptions of adjacent space, but these nearby heterotopia are necessary for the construction of space and for the understanding of space” (Jon L. Berquist, “Critical Spatiality and the Construction of the Ancient World,” in *“Imagining” Biblical Worlds: Studies in Spatial, Social and Historical Constructs in Honour of James W. Flanagan*, ed. David M. Gunn and Paula M. McNutt, JSOTSup 359 [London: Sheffield Academic, 2002], 14–29, here 18–19). See Michel Foucault, “Of Other Spaces,” *Diacritics* 16 (1986): 22–27.

¹¹In contradistinction to value-laden epithets such as *ancient Near East* and *Middle East*, current scholarship’s preference for neutral terms has resulted in the use of *ancient West Asia*. See Akira Tsuneki, “Introduction: The Aim of Study of Ancient West Asian Civilization,” in *Ancient West Asian Civilization: Geoenvironment and Society in the Pre-Islamic Middle East*, ed. Akira Tsuneki, Shigeo Yamada, and Ken-ichiro Hisada (Singapore: Springer, 2017), 1–11. See Nathaniel B. Levtow, *Images of Others: Iconic Politics in Ancient Israel*, Biblical and Judaic Studies 11 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2008). For Prinsloo, see below.

understanding this vision, (2) attend to the marginal details that problematize a holistic vision, and (3) interrogate the very concept of coherence, together with a proposal.

II. MOUNTAINS IN MICAH

A. *Shaped Mountains*

Drawing from a diverse set of spatial worldviews of ancient West Asia, Prinsloo proposes a spatial schema that is plotted along two axes: one horizontal and the other vertical.¹² Although a comprehensive retracing of that schema is beyond the scope of the present article, the view that Prinsloo outlines in relation to Jerusalem can serve as a helpful guidepost for the present purpose.

The cosmic center of the universe lies at the intersection of the horizontal and vertical axes. It is thought of as a mountain where the temple of the high god stands, the most sacred space.... The temple in Jerusalem was Israel's spatial center. Ascending to the temple mountain is positive.... Descending is negative.... To be in Jerusalem is to be in the center, to experience peace and life; to be far from Jerusalem is to be on the periphery, in the realm of chaos and death.¹³

With this spatial schema as the backdrop, I commence the first retracing of mountains in Micah or, more properly, “the (literarily) shaped mountains.”

The Mountain of the House of the LORD (1:4)

Then the mountains will melt under him
and the valleys will burst open,
like wax near the fire,
like waters poured down a steep place.¹⁴

ונמסו ההרים תחתיו
והעמקים יתבקעו
כדונג מפני האש
כמים מגרים במורד

¹²Building on the outcomes of the SBL/AAR Constructions of Ancient Space Seminar (2000–2005), Prinsloo presents a narrative spatial schema for reading biblical texts. For details and resources, see Gert T. M. Prinsloo, “Place, Space and Identity in the Ancient Mediterranean World: Theory and Practice with Reference to the Book of Jonah,” in *Constructions of Space V: Place, Space and Identity in the Ancient Mediterranean World*, ed. Gert T. M. Prinsloo and Christl M. Maier, LHBOTS 576 (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2013), 3–25. See also Prinsloo, “The Role of Space in the *שירי המעלות* (Psalms 120–134),” *Bib* 86 (2005): 457–77; Prinsloo, “From Watchtower to Holy Temple: Reading the Book of Habakkuk as a Spatial Journey,” in *Constructions of Space IV: Further Developments in Examining Ancient Israel's Social Space*, ed. Mark K. George, LHBOTS 569 (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2013), 132–54.

¹³Prinsloo, “Place, Space and Identity,” 10. This portrayal that the temple in Jerusalem was the cosmic center obviously betrays a Judean theological worldview. Other traditions had their representative cosmic centers, including Mount Gerizim for the Samaritan traditions. See Richard J. Clifford, *The Cosmic Mountain in Canaan and the Old Testament*, HSM 4 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972). See also Steven Fine, “Samaritans,” *Encyclopedia of Jewish Folklore and Traditions*, ed. Raphael Patai and Haya Bar-Itzhak (London: Routledge, 2015), 464–67, here 464.

¹⁴All biblical citations in English are from NRSV, unless stated otherwise.

The first mention of mountain(s) begins in the context of a threatening theophany,¹⁵ with which the book opens. The description that the LORD is a “witness against you [the people]” (לְעֵד בְּכֶם) already in verse 2 indicates that what ensues does not bode well. Further, the outward move (יָצָא)¹⁶ of the LORD, in the light of Prinsloo’s spatial schema, accentuates the negative tone. In addition, the LORD is said to be going out from “his place, the holy temple” (cf. v. 1). The expression “from his place” (מִמְקוֹמוֹ), similar to its only other occurrence, in Isa 26:21, with an intent of “punishing,” reiterates the threatening tone.¹⁷ Not only is the LORD “going out” but also “descending” (יָרַד), which adds to the theme of threat.¹⁸ It is in the midst of these many indications of projected punishment that the mountains are portrayed as melting,¹⁹ and their counterparts, valleys, split open. The parallel mention of mountains and valleys, following the Hebrew convention of merism, signals that God’s coming out and down has a cataclysmic impact on the entire world.²⁰ The punishing allusions in the outward and downward march of Israel’s God befit the depiction of melting mountains, making a pertinent thematic parallel.

Only after describing in detail the catastrophic coming out of God is the reason for that event laid out: it is due to “the crime of Jacob and the sin of Judah” (v. 5). And the effects are imagined in the form of a “wound” (מַכָּה, v. 9). Interestingly, this wound is portrayed as proceeding toward Judah, in fact reaching up to her capital, Jerusalem.²¹ In a parallel description, the wound is said to be “evil,”

¹⁵Theophany texts from the early Israelite traditions typically consist of cataclysmic events: thunderstorm, earthquake, or volcanic eruption (see Judg 5:4, Hab 3:3, Nah 1:5). See James L. Mays, *Micah: A Commentary*, OTL (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976), 43.

¹⁶For the military connotations of this verb, see Francis I. Andersen and David Noel Freedman, *Micah: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 24E (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 162.

¹⁷See Mays, *Micah*, 43.

¹⁸According to Daniel L. Smith-Christopher, “In prophetic literature, God’s ‘coming down’ is seen on occasion as an image of judgment” (*Micah: A Commentary*, OTL [Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2015], 52). On the cascade of downward movements and its threatening prospect in the arrival of God’s judgment in Micah 1, see Cuffey, *Literary Coherence of the Book of Micah*, 171.

¹⁹Theophany texts typically have “quaking mountains” (see Judg 5:4–5; cf. Isa 64:1–3; Hab 3:13–15). See James Limburg, *Hosea–Micah*, IBC (Atlanta: John Knox, 1988), 166. The same idea is attested even beyond the Hebrew Bible; the Ugaritic epic of Ba’al mentions tottering and trembling mountains. See Delbert R. Hillers, *Micah: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Micah*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 20.

²⁰On merism, see Jože Krašovec, “Merism—Polar Expression in Biblical Hebrew,” *Bib* 64 (1983): 231–39. Further, “the plurals suggest a global scale” (Andersen and Freedman, *Micah*, 165).

²¹If the proposed backdrop of the Assyrian arrival due to the Syro-Ephraimitic crisis (734–732 BCE) is assumed, then the text could indicate the Assyrian tactic of stripping the coastal areas in order to curb any Egyptian assistance. The listed cities (of the twelve, only six can be safely identified; vv. 10–16) can then be visualized as the dots that connected the marauding march of the Assyrians. Most of the identifiable cities are located in or near the Shephelah. On the historical

which—matching the LORD’s movement—comes down but reaches up to the gates of Jerusalem. As the wound/evil reaches the gates (v. 9), the children are taken out (v. 16).²²

Thematically, a question might arise at this juncture: What exactly is the crime/sin that occasioned the wound/evil to arrive at the gates of Jerusalem? The answer is outlined in Mic 2: from coveting houses to taking away children (vv. 2, 9), driving out women from their houses (v. 9) and yet daring to tell the prophet, “Do not preach” (v. 6). If the previous pericope outlined the wound as winding its way through the cities of the Shephelah, arriving at Jerusalem’s gates, the present account portrays the effect of the sin entering into the social fabric of the city: from land to house, and in the house from women to children. Hence, the prophetic condemnation comes—in full force and with a spatial touch: “This is no place to rest” (לֹא־זֶאת הַמְנוּחָה, v. 10). So, an outward move is envisaged: the LORD gathers the remnant (v. 12) and goes before them, passing through the gates (v. 13).

Micah 3 continues the list of aberrations at the upper echelons: from cannibalistic leaders to mouth-guided messengers²³ (prophets) (3:5). Therefore, even if the leaders were to cry out, the LORD would hide his face (3:4), and when the diviners look for an answer, they will receive none from the LORD (3:7). Both descriptions (hiding and no response) cohere with the portrayal that the LORD has already marched out and in front of the people (2:12–13). In short, the LORD who goes out from his place—both outward and downward—is then shown as going out with those who are taken out.

The Mountain of the House Will Be a Wooded Height (3:12)

Therefore because of you	לִכְן בְּגַלְלֵכֶם
Zion shall be plowed as a field;	צִיּוֹן שְׂדֵה תַחְרֵשׁ
Jerusalem shall become a heap of ruins,	וִירוּשָׁלַם עֵינַי תְּהִיָּה
and the mountain of the house a wooded height.	וְהָר הַבַּיִת לְבַמּוֹת יֶעָר

After depicting the crime/sin in all its appalling details (Mic 2–3), the summary of the crime comes in sanguineous and spatial terms: the sins are akin to “building Zion with bloodshed” (3:10). The judgment therefore ensues: Zion will

context, see Philip J. King, *Amos, Hosea, Micah: An Archaeological Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1988), 35. See also K. Lawson Younger Jr., “Assyria’s Expansion West of the Euphrates (ca. 870–710 BCE),” in *Archaeology and History of Eighth-Century Judah*, ed. Zev I. Farber and Jacob L. Wright, ANEM 23 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2018), 17–33.

²²The wound’s move makes an anomaly in Prinsloo’s spatial schema, which suggests that a move toward Jerusalem is typically positive. As Prinsloo cautions, however, his proposed model should not be taken as an “objective” blueprint. Hence, it is reasonable to conclude that not all “going toward” Jerusalem spells good tidings. See Prinsloo, “Place, Space and Identity,” 11.

²³Cf. Micah’s words against the prophets who manipulate their messages according to the pay they receive. The same is expressed with the metaphors of food (teeth and mouth; cf. 3:5).

be ploughed as a field, and her poetic parallel, Jerusalem, will become a rubble. In the midst of these details of destruction, the reader encounters “mountain” for the second time. Whereas the previous occurrence of mountains concerned a general description (in plural), here the focus turns to a particular mountain: the Temple Mount, which will be turned into a wooded height (במִוֹת יַעַר). The word יַעַר may be indicative of a neutral-sounding thicket-covered height or a ridge overgrown with bushes and trees (cf. Jer 26:18 || Mic 3:12).²⁴ Yet, following Prinsloo’s model, being away from the center indicates unholy locus and also disintegration. Some scholarly comments on this verse point in a similar direction. Bruce K. Waltke, for example, observes that, to the Israelite spatial imagination of holiness, which comes in concentric patterns (with the temple at the center), the thicket is indicative of an unholy locus.²⁵

To these, two other details are worth adding: (1) the term בְּמוֹת (“high places”) typically refers to places of illegitimate worship of YHWH or foreign gods.²⁶ As Bernard Renaud observes, “It seems scandalous that Jerusalem was transformed into a pagan high place.”²⁷ (2) The description הַר הַבַּיִת (“the Temple Mount”) is usually understood to be the cultic and theological center of the city, which is the temple of Israel’s God.²⁸ Yet there is one remarkable detail that is missing: the mention of YHWH in relation הַר הַבַּיִת—particularly in contrast to the next occurrence of הַר הַבַּיִת in 4:2. Waltke captures the import persuasively: YHWH is omitted “not

²⁴Marvin A. Sweeney observes, “The reference to ‘wooded’ must be understood in relation to wooded areas in Israel” (*The Twelve Prophets*, 2 vols., Berit Olam [Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2000], 2:375).

²⁵Waltke comments, “Space in the OT was divided into degrees of holiness... Within the Holy Land the forest was most unholy because there deadly and/or unclean wildlife ruled (see Isa 13:21–22; Jer 50:39; Zeph 2:13–15). The arable, tilled land, the source of life was much more holy, and the city of Jerusalem, where God lived, was more holy still. At the summit of the city, symbolically closest to God, was Mount Zion, which was still more holy (see Psalms 15, 24), and on top of it stood the holy temple consisting of a series of courts representing even further gradations of holiness. The building itself with its holy place, where only elect priests could enter, was most holy, and finally the Most Holy Place, where only the High Priest could enter, and then only once a year and not without atoning blood, was the most holy of all” (Bruce K. Waltke, *A Commentary on Micah* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007], 189–90). For a parallel reading of Mic 3:12 and Hos 2:14 as indicative of desolation, see BDB, s.v. “יַעַר.”

²⁶Sweeney, *Twelve Prophets*, 375.

²⁷Bernard Renaud, *La formation du livre de Michée: Tradition et actualisation*, EBib (Paris: Gabalda, 1977), 141, as cited in Waltke, *Commentary on Micah*, 184. Ralph Smith, however, by taking a cue from the LXX and BHK, advances a different view: “בְּמוֹת ‘high places’ probably should be singular בְּמֹת ‘high place.’... The parallel word ‘ruin’ suggests that the word is used in a physical rather than a cultic sense” (*Micah–Malachi*, WBC 32 [Waco, TX: Word, 1984], 34 n. 12a).

²⁸For instance, the Vulgate renders it as *templi* and the targum has מְקוֹדֵשׁ. See Limburg, *Hosea–Micah*, 178.

merely as a matter of style but to ‘desacralize it [the mount].’²⁹ If Waltke’s view is granted, the absence of YHWH in 3:12 makes a coherent connection with the previous description in Micah, where the LORD was depicted as going out of the city (2:12–13).³⁰

To summarize, the Micah spatial depictions of mountains—namely, the melting mountains of Mic 1, the Temple Mount imagined in pagan parlance (במות), and the missing mention of YHWH in Mic 3—all seem to cohere with the general condemnatory tone of this section (chs. 1–3).³¹

The Mountain of the House of the LORD (4:1–2)

¹ In days to come	וְהָיָה בְּאַחֲרֵי הַיָּמִים
the mountain of the LORD’s house	יִהְיֶה הַר בֵּית־יְהוָה
shall be established as the highest of the mountains,	נִכּוֹן בְּרֹאשׁ הַהָרִים
and shall be raised up above the hills.	וְנִשָּׂא הוּא מִגְּבֻעוֹת
Peoples shall stream to it,	וְנָהָרוּ עָלָיו עַמִּים
² and many nations shall come and say:	וְהָלְכוּ גוֹיִם רַבִּים וְאָמְרוּ
“Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD,	לָבוֹ וְנַעֲלֶה אֱלֹהֵי־יְהוָה
to the house of the God of Jacob;	וְאֵל־בֵּית אֱלֹהֵי יַעֲקֹב
that he may teach us his ways	וְיֹרֵנוּ מִדְּרָכָיו
and that we may walk in his paths.”	וְנִלְכֶה בְּאַרְחֹתָיו
For out of Zion shall go forth instruction,	כִּי מִצִּיּוֹן תֵּצֵא תוֹרָה
and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.	וּדְבַר־יְהוָה מִירוּשָׁלַם

The reader encounters the third occurrence of “mountain” at once and with an unmistakable contrast: the mountain of the house of the LORD will be raised above all other mountains from which the LORD’s word shall go forth. As Limburg observes, “The contrast is total. Instead of ruin and humiliation, we now hear of rebuilding and exaltation.”³² Desolate landscape is turned into a torah-disseminating center, which will be filled with the resounding arrival of many nations’ march toward it.³³ Even the hiding God (3:4) is now emphatically associated with the

²⁹See Waltke, *Commentary on Micah*, 183. Limburg suggests a similar view (*Hosea–Micah*, 178–79); however, see Andersen and Freedman, *Micah*, 385.

³⁰With its tone of restoration, verses 12–13 present one of the well-noted challenges to Micah’s coherence. For a diachronic proposal that verse 13 is a late addition to the original verse 12, see Mays, *Micah*, 73. However, a spatially sensitive reading, as outlined here, aids in viewing the verses in continuity with their immediate literary contexts. For a detailed study of 2:12–13, see Juan Cruz, “Who Is like Yahweh?: A Study of Divine Metaphors in the Book of Micah, FRLANT 263 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2016), 165–98.

³¹For the description of Mic 1–3 as “The Book of Doom,” see Andersen and Freedman, *Micah*, viii.

³²Limburg, *Hosea–Micah*, 180.

³³As part of the Zion tradition, the nations’ pilgrimage to Zion occurs in other prophetic texts as well (see Isa 60–62; Hag 2; Zech 8). See Sweeney, *Twelve Prophets*, 379.

mountain in Jerusalem/Zion;³⁴ the same God who was silent (3:7) will now open his mouth to utter words of peace (4:4). In short, what was merely “the mountain of the house” (הַר הַבַּיִת) dramatically transforms into “the mountain of the house of the LORD” (הַר בֵּית־יְהוָה, 4:1).³⁵ Further, the parallel with נִבּוֹן suggests that נִשָּׂא can be rendered as “it will remain lifted up.”³⁶ Such a vision of enduring exaltation adds to the abundance of spectacular transformations. Even the ensuing description is telling: the comparative מ in מִגְבְּעוֹת suggests that רֵאשׁ הַהָרִים is a comparative superlative that points to the mountains’ towering over the hills.³⁷ Such descriptions (enduring exaltation and the comparative superlative) are suggestive of a dramatic transformation of the mountain.

In sum, the changed portrait of the mountain seems to cohere once again with the changed tone in the theme of this section. Further, comparing this vision to other ancient West Asian perspectives of their gods with their associated sacral mountains, Delbert Hillers sees in these verses the cosmic abode of the God of Israel coming to rest on the mountain of the LORD,³⁸ a theme that receives an “everlasting” touch in the next occurrence of mountain.

The LORD’s Kingship on Mount Zion (4:7)

The lame I will make the remnant,
and those who were cast off, a strong nation;
and the LORD will reign over them in Mount Zion
now and forevermore.

וּשְׁמַתִּי אֶת־הַצְלָעָה לְשֹׂאֲרֵיהֶם
וְהִנְהַלְאָה לְגוֹי עֲצוּם
וּמֶלֶךְ יִהְיֶה עֲלֵיהֶם בְּהַר צִיּוֹן
מֵעַתָּה וְעַד־עוֹלָם

If the previous pericope spoke of an exalted mountain, the present occurrence attests to the Exalted One’s everlasting kingship from the same locus: “the LORD will reign over them in Mount Zion now and forevermore” (4:7). Prinsloo’s spatial model perceives Zion at the intersection of the two axes. Now it is complemented with the temporal touch—“everlasting.” Comparing this vision to the one in Mic 1–2, Mary E. Mills advances a persuasive spatial imagination, which she refers to

³⁴The emphasis can be deciphered in the triple mentioning of YHWH in 4:1–3, which meaningfully matches three occurrences of mountain(s) in verses 1–2.

³⁵As the expression “the mountain of the house of the LORD” appears elsewhere (2 Chr 33:15), Delbert Hillers considers it to be a late addition both here and in Isa 2:2; hence he omits it in his translation (*Micah*, 49 n. b). Daniel Smith-Christopher, however, argues that the expression must be correlated with the common references to “mountain of God” in Exodus, “which could easily have been adapted as a later reference to the temple, even as early as eighth century” (*Micah*, 129 n. b). While the LXX does not have the equivalent of “house,” IQIsa^a lacks יהוה אל הר יהוה (“to the mountain of YHWH”). See Smith, *Micah–Malachi*, 36 nn. 1a, 2a.

³⁶Waltke, *Commentary on Micah*, 196.

³⁷See V. P. Hamilton, “gib’ā,” *TWOT* 1:147. See also Waltke, *Commentary on Micah*, 196.

³⁸See Hillers, *Micah*, 50. Mays, for his part, notes a future nuance here (*Micah*, 96).

as two *comings out*. Whereas chapters 1–2 portray the coming out of God, chapter 4 speaks of the people’s coming out.

Whereas the travel encounters of phase one lead out from a venerable monument and progressive distance from the center adds to the dysfunctionality of communal relations, the movement of phase two draws back those who have been fragmented due to their distance from the center to the key area of temple-space so that they are no longer lost in the margins. At the heart of this twin message of alienation and reunion lie the static architectonics of the house of the deity.³⁹

As the text outlines, in the vicinity of the many nations’ declaration to go to the mountain of the LORD, from where the LORD’s torah will go forth (4:2), and in the eternal kingship of Israel’s deity (4:7), the depiction of the “raised” mountain (4:2) appears to cohere with the salvific oracles that fill this pericope. Further, this exalted state, if juxtaposed with the previous state of being “reduced to a mountain ridge,” bespeaks not only the drawing close (contra *במות יער*, “wooded ridge”) of the distantiated mountains but also the resacralizing (contra *במות*) of a desacralized mount. Therefore, the picture of a downward trend in the portrayals of mountain(s) in Mic 1–3 changes course toward an upward move at this point of detailed, dramatic transformations.

Mountains as Covenant-Controversy Hearers (6:1–2)

¹ Hear what the LORD says:

Rise, plead your case before the mountains,
and let the hills hear your voice.

² Hear, you mountains, the controversy of the LORD,
and you enduring foundations of the earth;
for the LORD has a controversy with his people,
and he will contend with Israel.

¹שמעו־נא את אשר־יהוה אמר
קום ריב את־ההרים
ותשמענה הגבעות קולך
²שמעו הרים את־ריב יהוה
והאתנים מסדי ארץ
כי ריב ליהוה עס־עמו
ועס־ישראל יתוכח

The penultimate occurrence of mountains is presented in the context of a covenant controversy (ריב; cf. 6:1).⁴⁰ The pericope begins by calling the defendant (not explicitly mentioned) to “arise and plead your case before the mountains” (v. 1).⁴¹ The significance of natural forces in trial genres has long been

³⁹Mary E. Mills, *Urban Imagination in Biblical Prophecy*, LHBOTS 560 (London: T&T Clark, 2012), 65.

⁴⁰For a critical appraisal of ריב, see Michael De Roche, “Yahweh’s *Rib* against Israel: A Reassessment of the So-Called ‘Prophetic Lawsuit’ in the Preexilic Prophets,” *JBL* 102 (1983): 563–74, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3260866>.

⁴¹Waltke calls for a distinction: elsewhere, the preposition את after ריב means “against” (*Commentary on Micah*, 345). Thus, ריב את־ signifies “to make accusation against.” Yet this semantic nuance pertains to persons, whereas in the current text the mountains are in view. All

recognized⁴² both within Israelite tradition and elsewhere because “they have stood since the beginning of creation.”⁴³ The poetic parallel, “the foundations,” also points in the same direction.⁴⁴

In sum, the characteristic of permanence in the case of natural elements, particularly of the mountains, stands out in this pericope. Interestingly, such a view meaningfully contrasts—or, better still, reinstates—the melting mountains at the beginning of the book. In short, if the previous two occurrences of mountains present a complementary juxtaposition of reduced mount (ch. 3) vis-à-vis the raised mount (ch. 4), the present depiction of enduring mountains (ch. 6) appears to restore an otherwise melting portrait of mountains (ch. 1). With these two telling reversals in the portrayals of mountains, could anything more be said of Mican depictions of mountains? Their final occurrence, therefore, beckons.

Mountains as the Farthest Boundaries (7:12)

In that day they will come to you	יום הוא ועדיך יבוא
from Assyria to Egypt,	למני אשור וערי מצור
and from Egypt to the River,	ולמני מצור ועד־נהר
from sea to sea and from mountain to mountain.	ויים מים והר ההר

The ultimate rendition occurs in the context of a universal ingathering (7:12)⁴⁵ that spans, first, between known loci—from Assyria to Egypt; from Egypt to the River,⁴⁶ —and then, qualified by the general description, “from sea to sea” and “from mountain to mountain,” which, according to James L. Mays, “encompasses the whole earth” (Zech 9:10, Pss 72:8, 107:2–3).⁴⁷

the same, the ambiguity as to who is being accused is resolved in the next verse: “the LORD has a case against his people” (v. 2). See also Hillers, *Micah*, 75 n. b.

⁴² See Hillers, *Micah*, 76 n. d: “In the ancient world important rivers were thought of as primeval elements, and are often associated with mountains in cosmogonic accounts, specifically those occurring in treaties. Thus, a common pattern in Hittite and Akkadian treaty texts is: ‘... the mountains, the rivers, the springs, the great deep, heaven and earth.’”

⁴³ Sweeney, *Twelve Prophets*, 396.

⁴⁴ Ibid.: “The term *ʿētān* means both ‘perpetual, permanent,’ and ‘ever flowing stream’ ... [and] became the basis for the abstract expression of permanence.” See also Hillers, *Micah*, 77; and Smith, *Micah–Malachi*, 50.

⁴⁵ See Waltke, *Commentary on Micah*, 455.

⁴⁶ Elsewhere Euphrates to Egypt is indicative of the boundaries of Israel (see Gen 15:18, Num 34, Deut 1:7, 11:24, 2 Sam 8). See Sweeney, *Twelve Prophets*, 411. While P. J. Calderone is uncertain if מצור is Egypt (see “The Rivers of ‘Maṣor,’” *Bib* 42 [1961]: 423–32), Andersen and Freedman aver that “the alternative name could reflect a different tradition of geographical terminology” (*Micah*, 587).

⁴⁷ See Mays, *Micah*, 162.

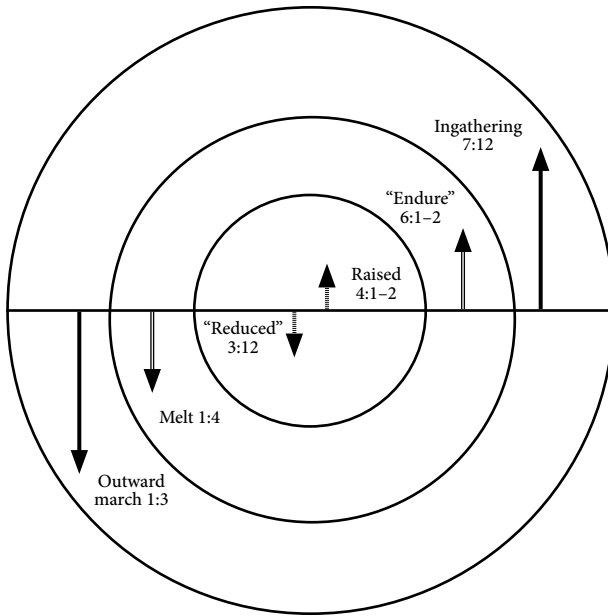


FIGURE 1. The Concentric Pattern of Mountains in Micah⁴⁸

Gathering these six instances of mountain(s) together, a conceptual schema could be drawn, consisting of three complementary pairs, arranged in a concentric pattern (fig. 1). At the center is the complementary pair of “reduced” mount of Mic 3 vis-à-vis the raised mount in Mic 4. Encompassing that pair are the “melting” (so, unstable) mountains of the opening theophany in Mic 1 vis-à-vis the mountains as the enduring witnesses in Mic 6. Outlying these two is the final pair that relates the going out of God from his place (with implicit reference to the LORD’s mount) vis-à-vis the ingathering of all from “[the] mountain.”

In sum, recourse to some ancient West Asian views of mountains, together with a stated focus on space, helps underscore the pairs of complementary themes in a concentric pattern.⁴⁹ At first glance, the concentric pattern, with the named mount at the center (3:12 || 4:1–2), appears to be a prophetic vision of space envisioned with a single center. A closer look at the environs of mountain(s), however, draws the reader’s attention to other, marginal details that indicate a pluriformity

⁴⁸Still, the thematic concentricity ought to account for a couple of details: (1) 1:3 has only indirect references to mountain(s); (2) the mention of mountain with the LORD’s kingship in 4:7 is to be taken together with 4:1–2 (both texts mention Zion).

⁴⁹The themes meaningfully correlate with the thematic shifts in the same corpus, which scholars have repeatedly reiterated. See, e.g., Ehud Ben Zvi, *Micah*, FOTL 21B (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 166.

of places that the same prophetic text overwrites. To attend to these details as part of the proposed second move, some suggestions of critical spatiality will serve as guideposts. Hence, a short overview of the relevant critical spatial sensibilities is in order.

B. Spatial Turn and Its Significance

Space has multiple dimensions. In a curiously comparable fashion, the field of critical spatiality is characterized by diverse theoretical insights. “No Grand Theory has recolonized the field.”⁵⁰ All the same, among the many proponents of the idea, Henri Lefebvre and his materialistic, Marxian-leaning trialectics (perceived-, conceived-, and lived-space) are regularly recognized as the watershed.⁵¹ Building on Lefebvrian thoughts, Edward Soja, by proposing his own trialectics (First-, Second- and Thirdspace), has consistently reiterated “Thirthing-as-Othering,” which highlights the resistive space of the boundaries.⁵² In other words, the praxis of the margins is to destabilize the constructed space. As such, critical spatial theorists call for the need to pay heed to the peripheries and the margins of the master narratives.⁵³ When adhered to, they alert one to the traces of diversity of details,⁵⁴ some of which constitute a contrast to, if not a subversion of, the principal portrayal.⁵⁵ It is to such diversity of details, which present some resistive instances to the prophetic depictions of mountain(s), that we turn now.

⁵⁰ See Jon L. Berquist, “Introduction: Critical Spatiality and the Uses of Theory,” in *Constructions of Space I: Theory, Geography, and Narrative*, ed. Jon L. Berquist and Claudia V. Camp, LHOTS 481 (London: T&T Clark International, 2007), 1–12, here 1.

⁵¹ See Henri Lefebvre, *Éléments de rythmanalyse: Introduction à la connaissance des rythmes* (Paris: Syllepse, 1992). See also Lefebvre, *Writings on Cities*, trans. and ed. Eleonore Kofman and Elizabeth Lebas (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996).

⁵² See Edward W. Soja, “Exploring the Postmetropolis,” in *Postmodern Geography: Theory and Praxis*, ed. Claudio Minca (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), 37–56; in the same volume, see also Soja, “Afterword,” 282–94. For details, see Berquist, “Critical Spatiality and the Construction of the Ancient World,” 20–21.

With regard to “Thirthing,” not every “Thirthing” is automatically “Othering.” See Christopher Meredith, “Taking Issue with Thirdspace: Reading Soja, Lefebvre and the Bible,” in *Constructions of Space III: Biblical Spatiality and the Sacred*, ed. Jorunn Økland, J. Cornelis de Vos, and Karen J. Wenell, LHOTS 540 (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2016), 75–103.

⁵³ Foucauldian heterotopia presents a helpful instance. See n. 10 above.

⁵⁴ This is akin to “postmodern geography ... [which] examines micro and macro levels, as well as the marginal and the plural” (Berquist, “Introduction: Critical Spatiality,” 3). Berquist here builds on John Paul Jones III, “Introduction: Segmented Worlds and Selves,” in *Textures of Place: Exploring Humanist Geographies*, ed. Paul C. Adams, Steven D. Hoelscher, and Karen E. Till (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 121–28, here 122.

⁵⁵ On how master narratives tend to diminish diversity, see Britta Kuhlenbeck, *Re-Writing Spatiality: The Production of Space in the Pilbara Region in Western Australia*, Anglophone Literatures (Münster: LIT, 2010), 2.

C. Shaping Mountains

Melting: A Mere Disintegration?

Theophany texts typically speak of quaking mountains. Against this backdrop, melting mountains in Mic 1 present a curious case. It is further complicated by the fact that “melt” is often used not for a change in topography but to describe people’s fear.⁵⁶ In this context, a literal reading of melting mountains seems impossible. This is perhaps the reason why the “LXX uniquely relieves the incoherence by changing ‘melt’ into *saleuthēsetai* ‘shake.’”⁵⁷ All the same, from the poetically parallel description in the ensuing colon, namely, “like wax before the fire” (v. 4b), the image of melting seems to be what the text depicts.⁵⁸

So, mountains do melt! All the same, as scholars rightly point out, such melting is at once suggestive of some residues. Mays, for example, makes a distinction between destruction and disintegration and observes that the latter is in play here.⁵⁹ Pointing to the topography of Israel, Sweeney likewise observes that “dissolve” here “does not mean that the mountains will literally disappear, but it refers to the natural phenomenon of flooding during the rainy season in Israel in which the rains will wash down the sides of the mountains.”⁶⁰ Thus, the coming judgment is not envisioned as an indiscriminate decimation of all that is on the path of the LORD. Complete destruction, therefore, seems to be far from the purview of this prophetic vision, which sets the tone of the book’s thematic dialectic, about which more will be said below.

A Cultic Condescension via Agrarian Overtones

The second occurrence of mountain, as noted, appears to be a condescending comparison of the Temple Mount to the cultically despised high places (במִוֹת). To this, some commentators tend to add a historical note. Smith, for instance, observes how, as prophesied by the prophet, the inhabitants of Jerusalem were later killed, the city was destroyed, the city walls were broken down (so also the palace and the

⁵⁶ See Josh 2:11, 2 Sam 17:10, Isa 13:7. See Smith-Christopher, *Micah*, 53.

⁵⁷ See Waltke, *Commentary on Micah*, 48; also Hillers, *Micah*, 17 n. h.

⁵⁸ Pointing to Palestinian topography, Smith observes that, in the area south of Jerusalem, rain was rare and the soil was claylike, such that “even a rain of less than half an inch created large, gushing streams and waterfalls powerful enough to move boulders and dig channels in the earth” (*Micah–Malachi*, 17). On the split valleys, Renaud observes, “In Palestine many trails are nothing but intermittent torrents of water. The Arabic *maurid* [comparable to Hebrew *môrād*] . . . would also have a sense of ‘ditch’” (*La formation du livre de Michée*, 13, as cited in Waltke, *Commentary on Micah*, 49). Hillers, however, discounts such naturalistic explanations and suggests that the text depicts stock theophonic images (*Micah*, 20).

⁵⁹ See Mays, *Micah*, 43.

⁶⁰ Sweeney, *Twelve Prophets*, 350; and see n. 58 above.

temple), and the entire city was burned.⁶¹ Other commentators, however, rightly highlight that such interpretive dispositions are attempts at granting too quick a closure to a text, which need not be the only reading option.⁶² For example, commenting on William McKane's observation that the close juxtaposition of "high places" and "forest/woodland" may be indicative of a wordplay, Smith-Christopher suggests that irony is operative here. Micah's use of "high places" (במות), a term typically designative of sacred places but now qualified as "wooded" (יער), is suggestive of the returning to natural growth, which would then be available for agriculture.⁶³

In Micah, a book that is noted for agricultural images,⁶⁴ such an agrarian tone deserves attention. Further, the book also memorializes Micah as a Moreshite, thus pointing to an outlying agricultural town in the Judean breadbasket of the Shephelah. As with other outlying Judean towns, Moresheth's prospects may have been repeatedly marred by the political intrigues at Jerusalem center.⁶⁵ Against this backdrop, the agricultural overtones in the reduced mountain could hardly be coincidental.⁶⁶ Even the poetic parallel judgment that Zion will be ploughed as a field adds to the agricultural tone. In sum, agrarian overtones—subtle though they are—share space with the dominant depiction of destruction in this pericope.

Highest among the Hills; Yet, in Company

As one turns to Mic 4, the exalted mountain of the LORD's house looms large. Given the topography of Jerusalem and its environs, where the temple mount is dwarfed even by its neighboring Mount of Olives, the vision of the mountain of the LORD's house as the highest of all could not be more spectacular. Nonetheless, the very expression "tallest mountain" tacitly approves the need for the other mountains to endure, if not for anything else, at least as the comparative referents.

Further, the universal march of nations to Zion comes with its own qualifying note. The pericope finishes with the acknowledgment: "For all the peoples walk,

⁶¹ Smith, *Micah–Malachi*, 35.

⁶² For example, Cruz ("Who Is like Yahweh?," 66) discounts such a stance of Gary Stansell (*Micah and Isaiah: A Form and Tradition Historical Comparison*, SBLDS 85 [Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988], 52).

⁶³ See William McKane, *Micah: Introduction and Commentary* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), 115, as cited and discussed in Smith-Christopher, *Micah*, 121 n. e.

⁶⁴ See D. N. Premnath, *Eighth Century Prophets: A Social Analysis* (St. Louis: Chalice, 2003), 176, as cited in Daniel L. Smith-Christopher, "On the Pleasures of Prophetic Judgment: Reading Micah 1:6 and 3:12 with Stokely Carmichael," in *The Aesthetics of Violence in the Prophets*, ed. Julia M. O'Brien and Chris Franke, LHBOTS 517 (London: T&T Clark, 2010), 72–87, here 85.

⁶⁵ See Philip P. Jenson, *Obadiah, Jonah, Micah: A Theological Commentary*, LHBOTS 496 (London: T&T Clark, 2008), 95.

⁶⁶ On how "biblical writers understood and experienced space, how their ideas and conceptions informed the texts they wrote, and the range of social meanings and significances," see Mark K. George, "Introduction," in George, *Constructions of Space IV*, xi–xvi, here xiii–xiv.

each in the name of its god, but we will walk in the name of the LORD our God forever and ever” (4:5). Comparing this view to the parallel text in Isaiah, Sweeney observes that, whereas the Isaian version is of “inviting Israel/Jacob to join the nations in recognizing YHWH’s sovereignty at Zion,” the Micah vision “accentuates the differences between Israel and the nations by emphasizing that the nations adhere to their own gods (Mic 4:5).”⁶⁷ In short, what began as an all-inclusive vision gets qualified by a note that there can be people outside this expansive inclusive vision. Besides the LORD, there can be other gods with their own adherents. In sum, in one and the same vision, a juxtaposition of a dominant view of an expansive inclusion and a subtle assertion of those who are outside that boundary occurs. Thus, diverse themes feature next to one another.⁶⁸

The LORD’s Eternal Rule and Back to Bethlehem

The subsequent depictions deal with kingship—both divine and human. Even here, a similar thematic trend can be discerned. The future divine kingship of the LORD on Mount Zion ushers in a reversal of fortunes (the outcast will be gathered, the lame will be the remnant, and the weak will be a strong nation, 4:6–7); Daughter Zion’s former dominion will return, and Jerusalem will reign (v. 8). In such a Zion-saturated chapter, it is hard to miss the traces of Zion theology.⁶⁹ The very next pericope, however, speaks of the future ruler chosen by the LORD as coming not from Jerusalem or its poetic equivalent, Zion, but from the little-known Bethlehem-Ephratha (5:2). Scholars have repeatedly reiterated how this is indicative of the humble origins of David.⁷⁰

Building once again on the Micah connection with Moresheth and therefore on the prophet’s likely knowledge of the predicament of the peasants on account of the policies that were formulated in Jerusalem, the reference to another outlying town of Judah might be indicative of the peasant-sensitive prophet’s polemic against the Jerusalem-centered leaders, as Mic 3 amply attests. In short, in the

⁶⁷Sweeney, *Twelve Prophets*, 377–78; and see 377 on the scholarly debates on the relation between these two parallel texts (Mic 4:1–4 || Isa 2:2–4).

⁶⁸For another compelling case of a diversity of themes in Micah, see Daniel C. Timmer, “The Nations in Micah,” in *The Non-Israelite Nations in the Book of the Twelve: Thematic Coherence and the Diachronic-Synchronic Relationship in the Minor Prophets*, BibInt 135 (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 90–115. To borrow Dalit Rom-Shiloni’s insightful expression, the said juxtaposition could be meaningfully counted as an instance of “exclusive inclusivity” (*Exclusive Inclusivity: Identity Conflicts between the Exiles and the People Who Remained [6th–5th Centuries BCE]*, LHBOTS 543 [London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2013], 27–29).

⁶⁹For a general overview of Zion theology, see Antti Laato, *The Origin of Israelite Zion Theology*, LHBOTS 661 (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2018). In the context of Micah and for a nuanced view, see Mays, *Micah*, 91, 95, 108. See also n. 33 above.

⁷⁰Charles S. Shaw traces these themes in Mic 5:1–2 and 2 Sam 7:6–7 (*The Speeches of Micah: A Rhetorical-Historical Analysis*, JSOTSup 145 [Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993], 146). Interestingly, “David” is not mentioned in the entire corpus of Micah!

vicinity of the everlasting kingship of the LORD, the exaltation of Zion is qualified by the humble origins of Israelite monarchy.

Controversy Hearers

As one reaches Mic 6, the mount of the house of the LORD has already been raised above all other hills, and the LORD's enduring rule is powerfully portrayed (ch. 4), together with the LORD's chosen ruler coming from Bethlehem (ch. 5). With God, God's chosen place, and God's ruler in position, it seems a good note on which to end the book. But Micah writes on. It is perhaps because there is one other thing that needs mending: the relationship between God and God's people. That very issue is outlined in the form of a covenant controversy. As already noted, the enduring natural elements—of which the mountains form a significant part—are presented as witnesses to the ריב. The accuser here is the LORD himself who presents his case, which comes with its own spatial touch: the deliverance from the Egyptian slavery (6:4) and the desert sojourn, which included the Moabite episode (6:5), culminating in the mention of two loci on either side of the river Jordan: Shittim and Gilgal (6:5).

As though moved by this passionate narration of the past deliverance, the defendant tries to match it by proposing a plenitude of gifts, which comes with a crescendo: burnt offering, a year-old calf (6:6), thousands of rams, streams of oil, and even the prohibited offering of one's own firstborn (6:7; cf. Lev 18:21, 20:3, Deut 12:31, 18:10). But the LORD's response, a much-cherished verse of Micah, states the expectation succinctly: do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God (6:8). To this, a word or gesture of acceptance on the part of the defendant would have brought the controversy to a happy close, but no response comes forth. Moreover, the silence is exacerbated by a cry from the LORD in the ensuing verse (6:9). With the socioeconomic sins still rampant, the LORD cries aloud to the city, and so the prophet laments (7:1). In short, in chapter 6, past deliverance, plenitude of gifts, and a suggested true disposition share same space—but only to leave the issue open-ended. What is truly required of the defendant then takes shape only as the book draws to a close: an honest acknowledgment of one's sins (7:9a) and a passionate plea to the one who can set things right.

Farthest Boundary or the Central Hill: Ambiguity Abounds

In the vicinity of the defendant's soulful confession (7:9), the final occurrence of mountains is presented as the locus of expansive ingathering of all the dispersed from the farthest boundaries. These boundaries are said to be "from sea to sea" and "[from] mountain [to] the mountain" (7:12). It pays to underscore that these expressions are often noted for both thematic and textual difficulties. Hillers, for instance, observes that the first phrase "sea to sea" is a stock boundary description where the West is always the Mediterranean sea and the East is also a sea in some

sense (see Exod 23:31). However, the description “from mountain to mountain” raises the question “which are these mountains?” since mountains feature less prominently in boundary descriptions.⁷¹

A textual difficulty also attends this text. Hence, as Smith observes, “some LXX mss correct the difficulty by rendering it as ‘from sea to sea and from mountain to (the) mountain,’ paving the way for suggesting an emendation: מהר to ההר ‘from a mountain.’”⁷² If the suggested emendation is granted, then the spectacular ingathering of the final vision presents the mountains as the farthest boundaries. Waltke, on the other hand, points to a reading that does not take the emendation route. He observes that הר may be “a nonconventional collective singular” and ההר “may be definite to signify Mount Zion, the well-known mountain.”⁷³

If the expression here were to be “the mount of the LORD” or, more explicitly, “the mount of the house of the LORD,” it would have made a perfect conclusion, with the ingathering of all from everywhere. But the text as it stands leaves the reference ambiguous.⁷⁴ Further, this is not the only ambiguity in this pericope. Sweeney spots a similar feature in the role of the nations: “do the nations come to threaten Jerusalem or to witness its restoration?” And he suggests that “this ambiguity is probably deliberate. The last statement of this pericope that ‘the land/earth’ will be desolate ... reinforces the ambiguity” (v. 13).⁷⁵

A similar ambiguity can be deciphered in the overall picture of mountain(s) in Micah (see fig. 1). Whereas the principal thematic flow appears to focus on a single mount (Zion/Jerusalem), other details bespeak a pluralization of the subject, accentuating the ambiguity by the unnamed mountains.⁷⁶ In short, a diversity of details characterizes the prophetic portrayals of the mountains. What do such a variety of visions and the ambiguities that attend them have to offer for a meaningful reading of the book of Micah? To this end, a spatial suggestion might be appropriate.

⁷¹ Although Hillers cites Magne Saebø’s suggestion (“Grenzbeschreibung und Landideal im Alten Testament mit besonderer Berücksichtigung der min-‘ad-Formel,” *ZDPV* 90 [1974]: 17–37, here 19) that Lebanon is the northern border (see Deut 11:24 and Josh 1:4), he observes that both of these texts are somewhat problematic (*Micah*, 88 n. k).

⁷² The suggested emendation is as old as the work of Wellhausen. See Smith, *Micah–Malachi*, 57 n.12 f. See also Leslie C. Allen, *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah, and Micah*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 391 n. 40.

⁷³ See *IBHS*, 249 §13.6a, as cited in Waltke, *Commentary on Micah*, 439.

⁷⁴ Nonetheless, it makes a meaningful bookend with the opening of the book, where the reference to the Temple Mount can only be teased out from other pointers (“from his holy temple,” “from his place”).

⁷⁵ Sweeney, *Twelve Prophets*, 411. Ambiguity abounds also in the way Egypt is referenced here. See n. 46 above.

⁷⁶ Such a pluralization is in keeping with the well-noted critical view of Micah regarding Zion theology. See Smith-Christopher, *Micah*, 29, 36, 46, 104, 136, 164.

III. RETROSPECTIVE RUMINATION AND A SPATIAL SUGGESTION

Thus far, the discussion has proceeded with two movements. The first move, “shaped mountains” retraced the prophetic visions of mountain(s) in the book of Micah. It was an unapologetically synchronic reading. Or rather—as the focus has explicitly been on space—a syntopic⁷⁷ reading, which aided in outlining three pairs of complementary themes in a concentric pattern. With the named mount at the center of the pattern, the prophetic vision appeared to be focused on a single center (see above under “Mountains as the Farthest Boundaries [7:12]”). The second movement, however, through critical spatial insights, turned to focus on other marginal details. In other words, it was a rereading that paused to underscore multiple layers of spatial details at each instance, which accounted for some of the ambiguities that attend the text. If the earlier, space-focused movement could be called syntopic, the second, peripheries-focused movement can constitute a diatopic⁷⁸—space, in all its details— reading.

SynDiaTopia

The book of Micah has rightly and repeatedly been noted for thematic paradoxes. Various attempts to find coherence amid such bewildering shuttling between

⁷⁷ Elsewhere *syntopic* (especially in biology) signifies a noninterfered sharing of habitat by species. See John D. Pinto, *Behavior and Taxonomy of the Epicauta Maculata Group (Coleoptera, Meloidae)*, University of California Publications in Entomology 89 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 25. See also Helmut Sick, *Birds in Brazil: A Natural History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).

However, the term is used here with the Greek nuance of *topos* as “space” (particularly, narrative) and the prefix *syn-* with its markedly “associative” significance. See *GELS*, s.v. “τόπος.” See also *MGS*, s.v. “σύν.” Thus, the first retracing of mountains was “in association with” space, that is, their narrative spatial portrayals.

⁷⁸ Within hermeneutics, the term *diatopic* describes “the idea that the *topoi* of a given culture ... are as incomplete as the culture to which they belong. ... The objective of diatopic hermeneutics is not, therefore, to achieve completeness ... but, on the contrary, to raise mutual incompleteness to maximum awareness” (Stephen R. Stoer and Luiza Cortesão, “Multiculturalism and Educational Policy in a Global Context [European Perspective],” in *Globalization and Education: Critical Perspectives*, ed. Nicholas C. Burbules and Carlos Alberto Torres, Society, Education and Cultural Change [New York: Routledge, 2000], 253–74, here 268, cited and translated from Boaventura de Sousa Santos, “Para uma concepção multicultural dos direitos humanos,” *Contexto Internacional* 23 [2001]: 7–34, here 23).

Again, the use of *diatopia* here is with the Greek nuance of *topos* as “space” (now, with critical spatial sensibilities) and the prefix *dia-* with its nuances of “thorough, diversely, and completely.” See *MGS*, s.v. *διά*. See also *GELS*, s.v. *διά*. The second retracing of mountains as such was a reading “right through” the principal portrayals, especially with attention to marginal details.

contrasting themes have resulted in a rich variety of proposals.⁷⁹ The present article, with its chosen—certainly, narrow—scope of mountains, adduces a note through a twin-spatial disposition, heuristically termed as syntopic and diatopic readings. The former foregrounded space and thus accounted for what seemed like a prophetic focus on a single mount. The latter problematized the former by drawing attention to peripheral details that pointed to the multiplicity of places that the prophetic text overwrites, contributing to ambiguities.

Often, diverse themes such as judgment/doom versus salvation/hope, pronations (see 4:1–5, 5:6) versus anti-nations (see 4:11–13, 5:7),⁸⁰ when defined with neat boundaries, have been instrumental in atomizing the Mican text. Yet scholars who observe ambiguities in Micah suggest that they may offer enormous interpretive possibilities. For example, Ehud Ben Zvi, Itumeleng J. Mosala, and Erin Runions have reiterated the value of viewing the diverse themes in a continuous interplay.⁸¹ In a similar—albeit geographical—vein, the present effort is an invitation to value the variety of details in the vicinity of the mountain(s). Or, if you will, it is a SynDiaTopic⁸² vision that adumbrates the Mican message in all its dialectic diversities.

⁷⁹Diachronic, synchronic, redactor-centered, reader-focused readings are some of such endeavors.

⁸⁰See Timmer, “Nations in Micah,” 90–115, here 96–99, 101–4.

⁸¹Regarding the possible purposes of ambiguity, Ben Zvi states, “(1) to provide a textually compact way of expressing a relatively complex set of ideas, (2) to draw the attention of the reader to the ambiguity itself and to the issues of identity and YHWH’s will regarding Israel and the nations around which the ambiguity is centered, and (3) to contribute to the re-readability of the text” (*Commentary on Micah*, 139).

Itumeleng J. Mosala’s reading of Micah focuses on the struggles and subtleties of the text as well as on the details that the same text omits (*Biblical Hermeneutics and Black Theology in South Africa* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989]).

Building on the views of Ben Zvi and Mosala, Erin Runions inquires into the changing subjects in the book of Micah and the significance of this for the Mican message (*Changing Subjects: Gender, Nation and Future in Micah*, *Playing the Texts 7* [London: Sheffield Academic, 2001]).

⁸²In the end and adhering yet again to the postmodern insistence on plurality, *syndiatopia* is an invitation to an interplay even between the two traces (syntopic and diatopic) of mountains in Micah.

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