



WEEK 8
01.22.17

MICAH: PROPHET OF RIGHT LIVING

FOCUS VERSE

Micah 6:8

He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?

LESSON TEXT

Micah 6:1–9

1 Hear ye now what the LORD saith; Arise, contend thou before the mountains, and let the hills hear thy voice.

2 Hear ye, O mountains, the LORD'S controversy, and ye strong foundations of the earth: for the LORD hath a controversy with his people, and he will plead with Israel.

3 O my people, what have I done unto thee? and wherein have I wearied thee? testify against me.

4 For I brought thee up out of the land of Egypt, and redeemed thee out of the house of servants; and I sent before thee Moses, Aaron, and Miriam.

5 O my people, remember now what Balak king of Moab consulted, and what Balaam the son of Beor answered him from Shittim unto Gilgal; that ye may know the righteousness of the LORD.

6 Wherewith shall I come before the LORD, and bow myself before the high God? shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves of a year old?

7 Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?

8 He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?

9 The LORD'S voice crieth unto the city, and the man of wisdom shall see thy name: hear ye the rod, and who hath appointed it.



FOCUS THOUGHT

The Lord's requirements are that we do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with God.



CULTURE CONNECTION

As the Days of Noah

“But as the days of Noe were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be” (Matthew 24:37).

The Bible portrays the days of Noah as an era of unbridled wickedness, total debauchery, and rampant evil. It sounds much like our day. According to FBI statistics for 2014, an estimated 1,165,383 violent crimes occurred in the United States. That equals an estimated 365.5 violent crimes per 100,000 inhabitants. Aggravated assaults accounted for 63.6 percent of violent crimes reported to law enforcement. Robbery offenses accounted for 28.0 percent of violent crime offenses; rape (legacy definition) accounted for 7.2 percent; and murder accounted for 1.2 percent. Information collected regarding types of weapons used in violent crime showed that firearms were used in 67.9 percent of the nation’s murders, 40.3 percent

of robberies, and 22.5 percent of aggravated assaults (www.fbi.gov/about-us/cjis/ucr/crime-in-the-u.s/2014/crime-in-the-u.s.-2014/offenses-known-to-law-enforcement/violent-crime).

The common response to the increased crime rate is to hire more policemen and write stricter laws. Nevertheless, at the time of this writing, St. Louis City police were expecting the 2015 murder rate to exceed two hundred, a sizable increase over 2014. New laws and stricter enforcement are only partial answers.

Paul wrote that he did not know sin except as it was revealed by the Law (Romans 7). Our world needs a strong prophetic voice boldly declaring the Word of God that we might be sanctified and cleansed by the washing of water by the word (Ephesians 5:26).

OUTLINE

I. THE JUDGMENT AT HAND

- A. Blatant Sins
- B. Destroyer at the Gate
- C. Jehovah’s Wrath
- D. A Remnant Promised

II. HOPE FOR THE FUTURE

- A. Hope Begins with Reproof
- B. Hope of Restoration

III. A PLEADING GOD

- A. The Controversy
- B. The Requirements

CONTEMPLATING THE TOPIC

Micah is one of the twelve “minor prophets”—minor only in the sense that their writings were shorter than the “major prophets,” Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel. Little is known about Micah other than he was from the town or village of Moresheth (Micah 1:1)—perhaps Moresheth-gath (Micah

1:14)—about twenty-two miles southwest of Jerusalem in southern Judah. From the historical record we know that during Micah’s youth, King Sennacherib of Assyria sacked and destroyed his village. We can assume the lad witnessed his relatives being butchered, the village burned, and able-bodied survivors enslaved. Such horror could have damaged the youth emotionally. Instead, it only seems to have strengthened his determination to serve Jehovah and Him alone.

Micah’s name means “who is like Jehovah (God).” He prophesied during the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, sometime between 750 and 686 BC. The corresponding historical biblical texts covering this period are II Kings 15–20 and II Chronicles 26–33.

Even though Micah’s prophecies were short, they were not “minor” in importance. The fact that later prophets and writers referred to them shows how highly they were esteemed. Some scholars consider his

writings to be some of the finest in the Old Testament.

Micah was a contemporary of Isaiah (Isaiah 1:1), but he was not as well-known; he was from the rural countryside. Even though his prophecies were the word of the Lord just as much as those of Isaiah, the prophet of the king's court, Micah's messages do not reflect the same knowledge of the political life in Jerusalem that Isaiah's do. If, as Jewish tradition indicates, Isaiah was a cousin of King Uzziah, this connection would have given him access to the palace and its intrigue. On the other hand, Micah was from an unimportant rural village with no political ties; he was of the common people.

Micah was also a contemporary of Hosea (Hosea 1:1), a man greatly used of God in an unusual way. Micah was one of the few prophets to prophesy to both Judah and Israel. Although he was from Judah and prophesied to Judah, his early messages were directed to Israel, the northern kingdom. He predicted the captivity of Israel, which occurred in 722–21 BC. His prophecies reflect the social conditions before the religious reforms under Hezekiah. Hezekiah's respect for Micah's prophecy later became an indirect means of saving Jeremiah's life (Jeremiah 26:14–19).

At the time of Micah's prophecies, Israel was in an apostate condition. Micah foretold the fall of the capital, Samaria (Micah 1:5–7), as well as Judah's desolation (Micah 1:9–16).

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

I. THE JUDGMENT AT HAND

A. Blatant Sins

Micah 1:2 cries to the nations to witness the judgment of God because of the sins of Israel and Judah. The root sins were idolatry and apostasy. The imagery of earthquakes and volcanoes in verse 4 describes God's anger against Israel and Judah. God held the capital cities and their rulers guilty of leading the people into sin. According to the *Asbury Bible Commentary*, "So complete would be the destruction of Samaria, so proud and so seemingly secure, so smug in a mountain fortress, that even the stones of the city's buildings down to the foundations would be

rolled into the valley below. Their idols, the images, and the city's wealth would be broken and carried away, and the site would be so barren that even vineyards could not be planted there."

While Micah's prophecy was directed to Israel and Judah, it was also a warning to the heathen nations round about. If God would bring fierce judgment on His own people, then the other nations should take warning.

Micah was so traumatized by the severity of the judgment coming upon Samaria that he said he would wail like the dragons (jackals, NKJV, ESV) and mourn like the owls (ostriches, NKJV, ESV). He would go stripped and naked in his grief, for God's wrath would reach even to Judah and the gates of Jerusalem (Micah 1:8–9).

B. Destroyer at the Gate

Assyria did come to the gates of Jerusalem. In 734–732 BC, Tiglath-Pileser III of Assyria led a military campaign against Aram (Syria), Philistia, and parts of Israel and Judah. The northern kingdom lost most of its territory, including all of Gilead and much of Galilee. Damascus fell in 732 BC and was annexed to the Assyrian empire. The Assyrian army returned in 722 BC under the command of Sargon II and destroyed Samaria, fulfilling Micah's prophecy.



"The Assyrian war machine was the most efficient military force in the ancient world up until the fall of the empire in 612 BCE. The secret to its success was a professionally trained standing army, iron weapons, advanced engineering skills, effective tactics, and, most importantly, a complete ruthlessness which came to characterize the Assyrians to their neighbors and subjects and still attaches itself to the reputation of Assyria in the modern day. A phrase oft-repeated by Assyrian kings in their inscriptions regarding military conquests is 'I destroyed, devastated, and burned with fire' those cities, towns, and regions which resisted Assyrian rule" (www.ancient.eu/Assyrian_Warfare/, accessed January 24, 2015).

C. Jehovah's Wrath

Micah 2 delineates the sins of Israel and Judah. Micah pronounced woe on the sinful people of Israel who devised wickedness upon their beds at night and arose in the early morning to perpetrate the evil they had planned. They practiced every sin of the flesh. Instead of sleeping at night, the rich men plotted how they could seize the inheritance of the poor. Because of their deliberate and cruel wickedness, the Lord would cause the conquerors to taunt and tease them with their own loss. Because of the rich men's arrogance and deceit, no one would be left to divide the fields to them. The destruction would be total. The nation would go into captivity.

False prophets warned Micah not to meddle in the affairs of the rich. They were the seed of Abraham. They were children of the covenant. They were God's chosen people, and as such could not suffer the fate that Micah prophesied. According to the *Asbury Bible Commentary*, "Micah responded by telling them that they were no better than night prowlers and thieves of the dark. They were greedy parasites who preyed on helpless women and children. They tried to cover their trail of sin by subtlety and deceit in order to gloss over the real issues. The only kind of prophet they would listen to would be one who would tell them the things they wanted to hear, such as of their own goodness."

D. A Remnant Promised

From a structural standpoint, Micah is a collection of short prophetic messages organized in a pattern of three cycles of judgment and salvation/deliverance oracles. Each begins with the word *hear*. (See Micah 1:2; 3:1; 6:1.) His messages alternate between oracles of doom and visions of hope—or to use Paul's terminology in Romans 11:22, between God's "goodness" and His "severity."

The first message of deliverance is in Micah 2:12–13 (NKJV): "I will surely assemble all of you, O Jacob, I will surely gather the remnant of Israel; I will put them together like sheep of the fold, like a flock in the midst of their pasture; they shall make a loud noise because of so many people. The one who breaks open will come up before them; they

will break out, pass through the gate, and go out by it; their king will pass before them, with the LORD at their head." Regardless of the coming calamity, a remnant of Jacob would be restored.

II. HOPE FOR THE FUTURE

A. Hope Begins with Reproof

The second cycle begins in Micah 3:1 with an indictment against the corrupt and incompetent leaders of Israel and Judah. Micah graphically likened their treatment of the oppressed people to cannibalism (3:1–4). He followed the condemnation of the leaders with charges against the false prophets (3:5–8) for leading the people into apostasy. He then revealed the divine justice: "Therefore shall Zion for your sake be plowed as a field, and Jerusalem shall become heaps, and the mountain of the house as the high places of the forest" (3:12). "The mountain of the house" refers to the destruction of Solomon's Temple.

B. Hope of Restoration

Micah followed his pronouncement of Jerusalem's destruction with a message of hope, declaring that Zion would have greater glory in the future than ever before: "But in the last days it shall come to pass, that the mountain of the house of the LORD shall be established in the top of the mountains, and it shall be exalted above the hills; and people shall flow unto it. And many nations shall come, and say, Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, and to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for the law shall go forth of Zion, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. And he shall judge among many people, and rebuke strong nations afar off; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up a sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more" (Micah 4:1–3).

The prophecy in Micah 4:1–8 shifts from the near-present pending doom and captivity of Israel and Judah and the future restoration of the Jews and looks forward to the millennial reign of Jesus Christ when the remnant

shall be restored and King Jesus shall reign, with Zion being His capital. Micah 4:3 foretells of a time of peace when swords would be beaten into plowshares. This same terminology is used in Isaiah 2:4 and Joel 3:10. Isaiah also said the nations would not learn war any more. Of course, this refers to the future earthly reign of the Prince of Peace.

We know prophecy is still in the future because nations continue to wage war. This author is not aware of any time since the Roman Empire's *Pax Romana* when the world has been free of conflicts and strife. Rome's "peace" was maintained by the force of its massive armies squashing any signs of rebellion. Woodrow Wilson's League of Nations, a forerunner of the United Nations, failed to keep its vision of worldwide peace following World War I, which Wilson called "the war to end all wars."

Joel, another minor prophet, spoke of this time:

"And it shall come to pass in that day, that the mountains shall drop down new wine, and the hills shall flow with milk, and all the rivers of Judah shall flow with waters, and a fountain shall come forth of the house of the LORD, and shall water the valley of Shittim. Egypt shall be a desolation, and Edom shall be a desolate wilderness, for the violence against the children of Judah, because they have shed innocent blood in their land. But Judah shall dwell for ever, and Jerusalem from generation to generation. For I will cleanse their blood that I have not cleansed: for the LORD dwelleth in Zion" (Joel 3:18–21).

Micah 4:11–13 affirms that although Israel and Judah would be surrounded by their enemies, ultimately they would be victorious. The Assyrians and the Babylonians brought judgment to the two nations and carried the people captive. The captivity lasted for seventy years. When the appointed time had expired, God moved upon heathen kings to allow the Jews to return to the Promised Land. This prophecy also looked to the

far-distant future when the Messiah would reign in Zion.

Micah 5:1 is prophetic of the Jews smiting Christ. Micah 5:2 is a well-known prophecy: "But thou, Beth-lehem Ephrathah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting." This is the promise the wise men clung to on their journey to visit the Christ child. Even though they followed the star, this verse pinpoints the birthplace of the Messiah.

III. A PLEADING GOD

A. The Controversy

The third cycle begins in Micah 6. Jehovah stated that He had a controversy with His people. He brought them up out of the land of Egypt, redeemed them, and gave them leaders who taught them the Law. Yet the people turned aside. They rejected their covenant with God, followed their leaders into idolatry, and corrupted themselves with all of the attending sins.

The righteousness of God demanded that He bring judgment on Israel.

"For the rich men thereof are full of violence, and the inhabitants thereof have spoken lies, and their tongue is deceitful in their mouth. Therefore also will I make thee sick in smiting thee, in making thee desolate because of thy sins. Thou shalt eat, but not be satisfied; and thy casting down shall be in the midst of thee; and thou shalt take hold, but shalt not deliver; and that which thou deliverest will I give up to the sword. Thou shalt sow, but thou shalt not reap; thou shalt tread the olives, but thou shalt not anoint thee with oil; and sweet wine, but shalt not drink wine. For the statutes of Omri are kept, and all the works of the house of Ahab, and ye walk in their counsels; that I should make thee a desolation, and the inhabitants thereof an hissing: therefore ye shall bear the reproach of my people" (Micah 6:12–16).

B. The Requirements

The prophet questioned, “Wherewith shall I come before the LORD, and bow myself before the high God? shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves of a year old? Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?” (Micah 6:6–7).

The inferred answer is no. God does not want mere outward signs of contrition or a mere show of repentance. Instead the Lord requires His people to act morally: (1) to do justly, (2) to love mercy, and (3) to walk humbly with God (Micah 6:8).

In the New Testament, Jesus simplified the Law into two commandments. First, we are to love the Lord with all our hearts. Second, we are to love our neighbors as ourselves. (See Matthew 22:35–40.) Micah’s summary of the Law is similar.

Do justly. The Ten Commandments pointed the way for the Jews to do justly, but they broke every commandment. If we love God supremely and love others as Jesus taught, we will be honest with them and treat them fairly. In writing to the Romans, Paul said, “Provide things honest in the sight of all men” (Romans 12:17). He admonished the Thessalonians to “walk honestly toward them that are without” (1 Thessalonians 4:12).

Love mercy. Mercy is a great moral attribute. If the Jewish leaders had loved mercy, they would have treated their fellow Jews fairly and mercifully. Many of the psalms request God’s mercy, for God is merciful to us. “It is of the LORD’S mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning” (Lamentations 3:22–23). Because we receive mercy from God, we should be merciful to others. “Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful” (Luke 6:36).

Walk humbly with God. If the Jews had walked humbly with God, they would have first cleansed themselves of their pride and arrogance, destroyed their false gods, and submitted to the will of God. Humility is the first step in recognizing our need of God. When we exalt God, we bow in humility and surrender our lives to Him. He will either be

Lord of everything in our lives, or He will not be Lord at all.

INTERNALIZING THE MESSAGE

In applying the principles of Micah to daily living, Chuck Swindoll stated:

“Much of Micah’s indictment against Israel and Judah involves these nations’ injustice toward the lowly—unjust business dealings, robbery, mistreatment of women and children, and a government that lived in luxury off the hard work of its nation’s people” (www.insight.org/resources/bible/the-minor-prophets/micah, accessed January 27, 2015).

Micah foretold doom and destruction on Israel and Judah because of their idolatry and apostasy, sins that in turn led to manifold wrongdoings and social injustice against the poor. Even though the messages were directed to Israel and Judah, they were also warnings to the Gentile nations round about. If Jehovah God would bring total destruction on His covenant people because of their sins, He would judge those nations just as harshly, if not more so.

As twenty-first-century Christians, we also need to take warning from Micah’s prophecies to Israel and Judah. God gives us warnings so we will not have to suffer His wrath. His judgment is sure if we fail to take heed and continue to ignore His Word. God has provided forgiveness for our sins through the shed blood of Jesus Christ.

The wise man of Proverbs said, “For whom the LORD loveth he correcteth; even as a father the son in whom he delighteth” (Proverbs 3:12). John stated, “By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous” (1 John 5:2–3). God disciplines us because He loves us. He knows sin destroys, and He wants us to be whole.

From this study of Micah, we should realize the judgments of God are real. However, He has never left His people without hope. When the Assyrians were at the gates of Jerusalem, Micah had a message of hope and deliverance.

We as the church could become fearful because of the daily headlines. However, regardless of how bleak and sinful our world may be, we have hope. One day the Prince of Peace will establish His kingdom. It will be a time of peace and safety when the weapons of warfare become implements of progress and the nations shall no longer study war. Until that time, let us do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with our God.

“And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all

things new. And he said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful. And he said unto me, It is done. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely. He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son” (Revelation 21:4–7).

We who have been redeemed by the blood of the Lamb, whose sins have been remitted in the name of Jesus, and who have His Spirit living within us, should not fear God’s pending judgment on this sinful earth. Instead, we should rejoice in hope, for the Lord is coming! ■

REFLECTIONS

- Contrast the governments and religious life of Israel and Judah.
- What would have happened if Israel and Judah had not gone into captivity?
- Contrast the ministry of Isaiah and Micah.
- What was the role of prophecy in the days of Micah? Has it changed? If so, how?
- Compare the spiritual condition of Micah’s day with today.
- What is the message of hope for the church today?