

WHO IS A GOD LIKE YOU? THE PROPHETIC BOOK OF MICAH

Notes For Week One: Background, Overview & Themes

The prophet Micah carried out his ministry at the same time that Isaiah was active, and the two books contain many similar themes. Micah is of course a much shorter book, and Micah is especially direct with his teachings and his illustrations. To begin our study of Micah, we shall go over some background facts, and then shall make a brief overview of the book and its themes.

Micah – The Prophet & The Book

Although little is known about Micah personally, we know a great deal about the era in which he lived and prophesied, both from Micah itself and from other books of the Old Testament. His name itself is also interesting and suggestive, in that its meaning parallels one of the central ideas of his prophetic ministry. Micah also has some important connections with two other prophets.

Micah's name and his ministry are related by a common theme. In Hebrew, the three names Micah (), Micaiah (or), and Michael () are all forms of the same name, and they mean "who is like God?" The name commemorates God's awe-inspiring, unique, eternal, spiritual nature, in contrast to everything else in the universe. It is thus fitting that Micah's ministry* should focus on this same theme, which he himself expresses in Micah 7:18.

* At least one other prophet, Malachi, has a name that matches his ministry. In Hebrew, Malachi means "my messenger", a theme that is reflected, for example, in Malachi 3:1.

The historical background to Micah is essentially the same as the background for Isaiah. These two prophets were both active in the 8th century BC (that is, the 700's BC). Micah tells us in Micah 1:1 that his ministry took place under three different kings of Judah (the Southern Kingdom): Jotham (a good but weak king), Ahaz (a thoroughly sinful king), and Hezekiah (a reformer). This means that Micah prophesied in a period from roughly 750 BC to 700 BC. The book of his prophecies most likely contains only a portion of the things that the prophet said or wrote during the course of his ministry.

Micah and Isaiah share much more than the same period. There are several themes that the two books have in common, and in some respects Micah is a more concise, pointed version of Isaiah. Micah has much to say about the coming of Israel's savior, the Messiah, as also did Isaiah. Micah also stresses the theme of the remnant of Israel, which again was important to Isaiah*. The two prophets also proclaim many of the same teachings about God's nature, character, and plans, and the two of them also issue many of the same criticisms and rebukes of God's people.

* In fact, the only two books of the Bible that use the term "remnant" more often than Micah are the long prophetic books of Jeremiah and Isaiah.

One particularly significant and interesting parallel passage is found in Micah 4:1-3 and Isaiah 2:1-4, which proclaim the establishment of "the mountain of the Lord." These prophecies tie together several ideas concerning God's plans for his people, culminating in the ministry of Jesus and his church. Later on, we shall study this passage in detail.

Another important piece of information about Micah's ministry can be found in Jeremiah 26:16-19. In Jeremiah 26, that prophet had been threatened with death because of his convicting lessons, and because his teaching did not tell God's people what they wanted to hear. The priests and prophets of Jeremiah's time (which was a century or more after Micah) stirred up the people to demand the prophet's death. The prophet's life was spared when a group of civil officials reminded the angry crowd of Micah's example. Referring specifically to Micah 3:12 as a case in point, they reminded the people that Micah had proclaimed many of the same harsh lessons that Jeremiah was then preaching, and he had not been punished. Further, the passage in Jeremiah indicates that Micah's lessons were one of the motivating factors for some of the spiritual reforms that took place in Hezekiah's reign.

Questions For Discussion or Study: Name some of the ideas that might be implied by Micah's name, "who is like God?" How might we expect to see these ideas used in his ministry? What significance is there to the time period in which Micah preached? What significance is there in the parallels between Micah and Isaiah? How does Jeremiah 26:16-19 help us in preparing to study the book of Micah?

An Overview of Micah

Before studying Micah verse by verse, we shall first browse through the book, taking note of the basic ideas and some particularly significant verses in each chapter. This will bring out some of the ideas that Micah stresses throughout the book, and it will also help to clarify the goals behind Micah's prophetic ministry.

In Micah 1, the book opens with a message of sin and judgment. After his introduction, Micah tells God's people that "the Lord is coming from his dwelling place" (1:3), and then with vivid imagery he describes God descending to the earth with awesome majesty, to rebuke wrongdoing. Micah then describes the howling and moaning (1:8) of the prophet when he realizes the harsh discipline that the people will now endure. By this, the prophet indicates that God himself does not enjoy dispensing discipline, but only does it for the people's good. The people themselves, though, will themselves howl and moan because of the punishment that will be given to them.

Micah 2 contrasts fleshly perspectives and godly perspectives. The fleshly are described as plotting evil, even when they are in bed (2:1), and they also tell prophets such as Micah to stop telling them things that they do not want to hear (2:6). God, in contrast, is disciplining his people in order to bring together a remnant (2:12) that he can lead and bless. Unfortunately, when Micah proclaimed this message, the people were so intent on their own plans and goals that they had little appreciation for what God had planned for them.

In Micah 3, the prophet issues a series of rebukes to the leaders, rulers, prophets, and priests of God's people. Micah uses convicting imagery to describe their sins, portraying the leaders and rulers as breaking the bones of their people (3:2-3), that is, they were exploiting them for their own agendas, rather than serving them and strengthening them. The prophets and priests of the time – with a few exceptions such as Isaiah and Micah – were themselves leading the people astray (3:5) through false teachings and unspiritual attitudes.

The tone of the book changes in Micah 4, which contains the prophecy about the "mountain of the Lord" that was mentioned above. Micah sets this "in the last days" (4:1), and amongst other

things, this passage describes many aspects of Jesus' ministry. The prophet also promises that God "will make the lame a remnant" (4:7), and he develops this important theme further.

This visionary perspective continues in Micah 5, with promises of deliverance. This is the chapter that contains the promise to God's people of a ruler from Bethlehem (5:2). It also describes the triumph of the remnant (5:7-9) after God has spiritually prepared the remnant to be led in victory.

Another change of tone comes in Micah 6, as the prophet returns to a discussion of God and of God's relationship with his people. God asks his people "how have I burdened you?" (6:3), and he indicates his own desire to remain close to them. Micah tells the people that the Lord is calling (6:9), which is both an opportunity and a warning to them.

Micah 7 closes the book with teachings about the falling and rising that will result from God's coming. The prophet issues further warnings, but then says that he will "watch in hope" (7:7), calling the people to do likewise. He closes the book with a set of reasons why no one else is like God (7:18), re-emphasizing this theme and also giving reasons for it.

Questions For Discussion or Study: What ideas stand out the most in this brief overview of Micah? Why might Micah change his tone in chapter 4 and again in chapter 6?

Some Significant Themes in Micah

In browsing through the book of Micah, some of the most important ideas quickly become apparent. Micah's message contains many specific teachings, numerous rebukes of God's people, and several remarkable promises to them. But all of the most important ideas center on our understanding of God, of who he is, and of why he does what he does. Micah knows that, if we can understand these things better, many other things will also become clearer to us.

Micah poses the question, "who is like God?", and at the same time he wants to give some answers to the related question, "what is God like?" Micah describes God's power and authority, both in words and in images. He also proclaims God's righteousness, his unyielding opposition to sin, falsehood, and impurity. He also vividly expresses God's grace and vision. These are the crucial ideas in the book, and they are also the most crucial ideas for believers to understand. Micah shows throughout his book how a better understanding of these aspects of God's nature and character can strengthen us spiritually.

Micah also has much to say about God and his people. God's relationship with his people is characterized as a contrast between divine consistency and human inconsistency. This could characterize his relationship with believers in almost any time period. God's nature is always the same – as James says, he does not change like shifting shadows (James 1:17). Those who think that God changed his nature after the Old Testament era, or that he has changed since the first century AD, are badly mistaken, and those who proclaim such errors are simply demonstrating their own inability to understand the teachings of the Scriptures.

As we have seen, Micah also has much to say about the remnant, which is one of the most important aspects of the relationship between God and his people. Throughout history, God has periodically chosen and preserved a remnant to rebuild his people whenever worldly living and

worldly perspectives have become too deeply entrenched for God to allow his people to continue in their present ways. In Micah's lifetime, the remnant was already an important aspect of Israel's past history. Micah would also teach them its importance for the present and for the future.

Questions For Discussion or Study: How are these themes important in our own relationship with God? In what ways can they help us in the ways that we seek and serve God? How might we expect Micah to illustrate or teach these ideas?

For Further Study

Since Micah is fairly short, many commentaries on it also cover other prophetic books. Below are several selected commentaries for the study of Micah. If you would like any suggestions for studying Micah on your own, and/or for choosing reference materials, just let me know.

Elizabeth Achtemeier, *Minor Prophets I* (New International Biblical Commentary)
Leslie C. Allen, *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah, & Micah* (New International Commentary)
Francis I. Andersen & David Noel Freedman, *Micah* (Anchor)
D. Baker, D. Alexander, & B. Waltke, *Obadiah, Jonah, Micah* (Tyndale Commentaries)
Michael Bentley, *Balancing the Books – Micah & Nahum Simply Explained* ((Welwyn)
Alberto Ferreiro (editor), *The Twelve Prophets* (Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture)
Frank E. Gaebelein (editor), *The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Volume 7*
James Limburg, *Hosea-Micah* (Interpretation Commentary)
David Prior, *The Message of Joel, Micah, & Habakkuk* (Bible Speaks Today)

-Mark Garner, *Northland Church of Christ, Columbus, Ohio, March 2005*

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WHO IS A GOD LIKE YOU? THE PROPHETIC BOOK OF MICAH

Notes For Week Two: The Mountains Me^t Beneath Him ☐Micah ☐☐

The prophet Micah opens his book of prophecy with a solemn warning to ☐od's people. He uses vivid language to tell them that ☐od is coming to earth because of their sins, and he expresses his own anguish over the prospect. On the surface, this passage might seem like a simple denunciation of sin. But Micah's approach suggests that there is more to it than that.

☐eview

The book of Micah can be roughly divided into three sections. The first three chapters primarily expose the spiritual illnesses of God's people, showing them as they are. The fourth and fifth chapters shift to a majestic and visionary tone, presenting what God wants for his people, and what God plans to do for them. In the final two chapters, God discusses his relationship with his people, calling them to listen, to repent, and to change. The book then closes with a magnificent statement of God's nature. For a more detailed overview of Micah, along with background details and a discussion of the main themes of the book, see the notes from Week One.

For most of the first three chapters, Micah is stern and somber in tone. But this is important, first of all in order to emphasize some things about God that his people have forgotten. In addition, if God's people – whether in Micah's day or in our own – are to appreciate fully the things God has done for them, they must first realize how completely helpless we are to save ourselves.

☐isten☐O ☐arth ☐Micah ☐☐☐☐☐

Micah introduces his prophecy with a brief statement of the dates of his ministry, and then he makes a bold appeal to God's people, calling them to listen to his prophetic message. The historical setting helps us to understand the times that Micah lived in, and his urgent appeal helps us to see the importance of the message that God gave him.

Micah begins by setting the context for his prophecies (1:1). In his very first words, he says that the Word of the Lord came to him. Neither Micah nor any of the prophets, nor Paul nor the New Testament writers, ever claimed that their own expertise or education was a reason why anyone should listen to them. We study the books of the Bible not because of their human authors, but because God's Holy Spirit wrote them, using these faithful, willing believers as his instruments.

Micah's ministry took place during the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah*, who were kings of Judah in the last half of the 8th century BC (roughly 750-700 BC). Jotham was personally faithful to God, but during his reign he made no progress against idolatry and unauthorized worship as practiced by others. Ahaz, on the other hand, was thoroughly wicked and idolatrous, even offering his own son as a human sacrifice, in his allegiance to false gods. Hezekiah was one of Judah's greatest reformers. As we have noted already, Jeremiah 26:16-19 suggests that Micah's preaching may well have been one of Hezekiah's sources of motivation for his reforms.

* For more detailed descriptions of these kings and their reigns, see 2 Kings 15:32-20:21 (see also next note) and 2 Chronicles 27-32.

The end of this verse also reminds us of an important reality in Micah's times. Since the death of Solomon, roughly two centuries earlier, God's people had been divided into two kingdoms: a Northern Kingdom, called Israel or Samaria*, with its capital in the city of Samaria*, and a Southern Kingdom, called Judah, with its capital in Jerusalem. The Northern Kingdom had been idolatrous since its inception, and Micah was one of the prophets who pronounced its final end (see Micah 1:6-7)**. The Southern Kingdom, Judah, went through a lengthy repeating cycle of spiritual renewal and decline, which continued all through Micah's lifetime.

* Note, in particular, that when Micah refers to "Samaria", he is actually referring to part of what we would call Israel, not to the people we know as the Samaritans.

** 2 Kings 17 has a historical description of the fall of the Northern Kingdom.

Micah then makes an impassioned call to be heard (1:2). His urgent call to listen is made not only to God's own people, but to all the earth and everyone in it. The reason for this is that God is going to display his power to the whole world. Further, God himself is coming, in part, as a witness of the wrongs that his people have done him. For that matter, any time that God himself comes to earth, it ought to be of concern for the whole world.

Questions For Discussion or Study: How does an awareness of Micah's time period help us to interpret what he will say? Given what we know about his era, what kinds of issues and topics might we expect him to discuss? What message does his call in verse 2 have for us?

The Lord is Coming Micah □□□□□

When the Old Testament prophets would say that God was coming, they meant that God had decided that the time had come to render judgment, to distribute justice, or to act decisively. Micah uses such imagery here, in telling the people of Israel that God must discipline them for their sins. His imagery is not meant to frighten, but rather to edify. One of the reasons why our hearts so often wander from God is that we simply forget how powerful and extraordinary he is.

The prophet says that God is coming from his dwelling place (1:3-4). The images that follow are not meant to be taken too literally, but rather are images designed to depict power and authority. When Micah describes God as walking on the earth's high places, causing the mountains to melt and the valleys to split, he is emphasizing how much greater and more powerful God is than we can ever imagine. Even a human giant of those dimensions would be impossible for us to fight, and God's true nature is far greater than even these illustrations can indicate.

Likewise, God has complete control over everything that happens on the earth. If he can control natural forces, he can surely do as he pleases in human affairs. God's patience is so great that he often allows our rebellion and disobedience to continue long past the point that any human authority would tolerate. But we should not allow God's extraordinary patience to become an excuse for laziness or spiritual slackness – that is what God's people have done in Micah's day.

The reason for this display of divine power and authority is Jacob's transgression (1:5-7). God would greatly prefer to 'come' on a mission of grace and blessing, but he cares too much about his people to allow them to drift too far away. He says that Jacob's transgression is Samaria itself – that is, the strong and seemingly prosperous city of Samaria, which actually exemplified the ways that the northern half of God's people had gone astray. Judah, meanwhile, is described

as having its "high place"* in Jerusalem. Micah means by this that the city of Jerusalem itself had become, in essence, an idol to the people of Judah, who took false security from the temple and the other religious symbols of that important city.

* In this context, a "high place" refers to a place of unauthorized or inappropriate worship or sacrifice. The high places were a chronic spiritual problem in ancient Israel, and the prophets often preached against them. In many cases, the worship at high places was done in the name of God, but without proper motivation. Many who used the high places did so to avoid the requirements of the Levitical system.

God's people had committed many sins, to be sure. But one central problem was one of bad priorities. Israel in the north had, in general, valued prosperity and power above all else, certainly above God. Judah in the south often allowed their worship and service to God to become routine, thinking that the presence of Jerusalem and its temple made them superior to their brothers in the north.

For the Northern Kingdom, time had run out, and Micah himself proclaimed its fall in verses 6-7. In 722 BC, the Assyrian Empire attacked and conquered Samaria and the north, causing devastating destruction in so doing. The Assyrians did not stop there, but continued in an attack on Judah that brought about a prolonged crisis there. Micah lived through these troubled times, and he called his listeners to see in these events a warning and an exhortation to listen to God.

Questions For Discussion or Study: What would Micah's listeners have felt and thought while hearing his vivid description of God coming to earth? What kind of response should we have to these verses? What does Micah mean in saying that Jacob's transgression is Samaria, and Judah's high place is Jerusalem? What do these images have to say to us? What lessons would Micah have wanted his listeners to get out of his prophecy that Samaria would fall?

□ *Howling & Moaning* □ *Micah* □ □ □ □ □ □

While the rest of the nation was living complacently, Micah saw and practically felt the pain of the discipline that was coming from God. The caring prophet already senses the hard times that lie ahead when God will act to bring his people back to him. After expressing his own anguish, Micah issues a series of statements to different towns in Israel, many of which are plays on words, as a device for helping the people to understand God's reasons for what he is about to do.

As was often the case with the faithful prophets, Micah was greatly distressed by his own message (1:8-9). In fact, one of the signs of a true prophet or preacher or teacher is the willingness to say things that he himself finds disturbing, if these things are from God. In Micah's time, as in our own, there were also plenty of prophets who simply said what pleased them or their hearers, rather than what pleased God. But Micah, while faithfully proclaiming the words that God gave him, was nevertheless driven to weep, wail, howl, and moan in dread of what he knew was going to happen to those around him.

Micah also knew that, though his message of final doom was specifically for Samaria, Judah's time might also be near (verse 9). They had committed many sins of their own, and had struggled in their faithfulness to the point where their own spiritual health was very weak. Indeed, when the Assyrians defeated Samaria, they would quickly begin to inflict pain and misery on Judah, and at times it must have felt almost as bad as total destruction. Micah also sensed the exile (see verse 16) that might lie ahead someday if there were no repentance.

The rest of the first chapter of Micah consists of a series of pronouncements given mostly to specific towns. Beginning with "tell it not in Gath", Micah proceeds to make several points using wordplay that is not always translatable into English (1:10-16). Rather than give a detailed discussion of every point, which can be found in some of the recommended commentaries on Micah, here we shall just point out some examples of Micah's plays on words, and then shall discuss the reasons for them.

Most of the statements in these verses combine names of towns with words that were very similar in Hebrew (but that are usually much different in English). For example, Beth Ophrah (verse 10) means "house of dust" in Hebrew, so Micah figuratively describes them as rolling in the dust. Mareshah (verse 15), sounds like the Hebrew word for "conqueror", so Micah is pointing out their helplessness, in saying that a conqueror will come against them. To put it in parallel terms, if Micah were preaching his message in Ohio, he might say things like "those who live in Canton can't save themselves", or "Cincinnati is guilty of sinning twice".

There are at least three reasons why Micah takes this approach. Most simply, it makes for some memorable sayings. Just as he and the other prophets often used figurative images to impress a point on the minds of their listeners, this is another device to make his sayings more memorable, so that his message of warning might take root and produce change. Then too, the list of town after town makes a point that would not be as clear if Micah only warned the nation in a general way. This passage emphasizes that every one of these towns is under God's control. He can see everything that they are doing, and he can act against them whenever it becomes necessary.

Finally, there is another principle that will come up again in Micah, and that appears also in other prophetic books. God's discipline is always appropriate. When his people insisted on being like worldly nations, he gave them over to worldly nations. Micah is saying that, for example, it is appropriate for the residents of Beth Ophrah, the "house of dust", to roll in the dust. They are just getting what their actions have brought upon them, not literally, of course, but in a spiritual context.

Questions For Discussion or Study: What does Micah's distress about his own message say about him? Can you find similar examples from other prophets? What lessons should we learn from it? Study some of the plays on words that Micah makes in verses 10-15. How do these fulfill one or more of the purposes outlined above?

-Mark Garner, Northland Church of Christ, Columbus, Ohio, March 2005

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WHO IS A GOD LIKE YOU? THE PROPHETIC BOOK OF MICAH

Notes For Week Three: A Clash of Perspectives in Micah 1:1-5

Micah knew that many of the spiritual disorders amongst God's people stemmed from a faulty, worldly perspective. In this passage, he reveals what is in their hearts and minds. These underlying problems have in turn led them into sinful behavior. As Micah describes this, he also provides glimpses of God's own perspective, which he will describe in detail later in the book.

Overview

The first three chapters of Micah consist largely of denunciations of the sins that God's people have committed, and of the worldly perspectives that have led to those sins. In particular, Micah calls the people to see how badly they have misunderstood God's nature and character.

In the first chapter, Micah pronounced judgment on Samaria, the northern half of God's people, and followed that with a series of plays on words that emphasized God's absolute control over events and the appropriate nature of the discipline that he would send. He now gets more specific with the reasons why the people needed to be disciplined.

Plotting Evil on Their Beds in Micah 1:6-7

The prophet uses the image of someone plotting evil even while in bed, as a way of describing how deeply rooted the sins of God's people have become. This passage particularly convicts those who have pursued material gain or other advantages at the expense of their fellow beings. Micah announces that they will be disciplined for this, in an appropriate fashion.

The people have strayed so far from God that they are plotting evil all of the time (2:1-2). It is one thing to make sinful plans when one is out in the world, facing temptations and opportunities to sin. But if an individual thinks up evil schemes even while falling asleep at the end of the day, that is a sign of a deeply selfish and sinful character indeed. The prophet thus declares woe to such persons – not at all meaning to restrict this "woe" to those in the literal situation that he has described, but also pronouncing it upon all those who look at the world around them as an endless source of opportunities to indulge their senses and to commit sins.

Micah particularly rebukes those who defraud or exploit others. This is a sad feature of human society that never changes. The possession of power, authority, or money inevitably leads weak humans to crave more of the same thing, and to do whatever is necessary to acquire it. Thus the prophet says that they carry out these evil schemes simply "because it is in their power to do so." The ability or opportunity to exploit someone, or to acquire something that one desires at the expense of another, never justifies or excuses committing such acts.

The prophet, though, assures such persons that they will no longer walk proudly (2:3-5). Pride is a hellish companion to many other sins, and especially to sins that involve greed and covetousness. Micah's double rebuke for the combination of pride and exploitation is similar to Obadiah's prophecy against Edom. Here too, God is planning disaster on the land because this kind of fraud is so widespread and so easily tolerated.

Micah even paints a picture of the downtrodden rejoicing in the discipline that their tormentors will soon receive. This is not meant to be a literal approval of ridiculing or mocking those whom God disciplines, but rather – much like James 5:1-8 – it is meant to reassure and to instill patience in those who are being mistreated. For the punishment upon these exploiters will be both certain and appropriate. Since they did not want to follow the plan that God himself provided to distribute land so as to preserve inheritances*, but rather felt that land should be possessed by whomever had enough force to seize it, God will take their land away by force. This stern, but fitting, punishment reprises one of the themes of Micah 1:10-15.

* This plan, to which Micah 2:5 refers, was based on Numbers 34:13 and Joshua 18:10.

Questions For Discussion or Study: What kinds of persons do you think Micah refers to in verses 1-2? Does he only mean economic exploiters, or would others also be included? Why is the punishment for those who defraud going to be so severe? In what ways is it appropriate? To what is Micah referring in verse 5 when he mentions dividing the land by lot? In what ways is this relevant to us?

□□o □ot Prophecy□ □Micah □□□□□

The hearts of the people have strayed so far from God that now they will no longer even listen to someone who, like Micah, speaks the true words of God. The people deny even the possibility of God bringing upon them the discipline that Micah has foretold. But the prophet now exposes the real problem with the way that they respond to God's Word.

Micah here quotes what he himself is being told by his hearers, even those who are themselves prophets: "do not prophesy about these things" (2:6-7a). These false prophets are making themselves popular by telling the people what they want to hear. But Micah, by teaching the truth, is rejecting both their message and their motivation. So, as also happened to some of the other inspired prophets, Micah faces pressure to suppress teachings about sin and judgment.

In their distorted view of God, the false prophets think that they have an effective answer to Micah's inconvenient teachings. They point out an implication of Micah's teachings: would a loving God really do bad things to his own people? This view of God has been popular in every generation – but it has also been erroneous in every generation. Here, they not only deny that God would do anything to them, but also feel that it is wrong even to talk or teach about God's absolute righteousness.

Micah, however, succinctly refutes their error, reminding them that yes, indeed, the true words of God always do good (2:7b). But they do not do 'good' as humans usually reckon it. That is, the Word of God does not always make us feel good or feel comfortable. Instead, it tells us whatever we need to hear. If we need encouragement, it encourages us. If we need correction, it corrects us. The point that the prophet makes is that God's Word always does good to those whose ways are upright, because they will always heed it and get spiritual benefit from it. They may not reap the benefits immediately, but in the long run they will be blessed in what they do.

Questions For Discussion or Study: What motivations might the false prophets have in telling Micah no longer to proclaim his message? Are there any similarities in our own experience? What is wrong with their view of God? How does Micah answer their erroneous view of God? What lessons should we get out of these two verses?

Like An Enemy Micah □□□□□□

Micah now shows God's people how their misguided perspective has led them to reject God's ways in their daily lives. Although they still claim to be faithful to God, many of the things that they do show them actually to be God's enemies. Because they had turned away from the truth in their minds and hearts, they soon turned away from the truth in the way that they acted.

The prophet exposes the fact that their lives are filled with cruelty and coldness (2:8-9). What one believes will eventually become clear to others through his or her life. The surge of evil behavior in God's people testified as to how far their hearts had strayed from him. Micah illustrates their selfishness and insensitivity with some convicting examples. These examples also have a common factor. In picking on travelers, women, and children, these exploiters were going after easy targets, who would be without adequate defenses. This shows a degree of cowardice along with their other sins.

Micah also points out something here that he had mentioned earlier. Any form of stealing is ugly and sinful, but when it involves denying others the blessing or the inheritance that God has given to them, it is an even worse offense. God's law for ancient Israel was carefully crafted so as to protect everyone from the worst effects of the unforeseen events in life. But in Micah's generation (as, unfortunately, in many other generations throughout human history) such considerations had become unfashionable, and it was considered right and proper to take what you could get. Such callousness is always a sign of being distant from God.

Because of all this, God calls the land a place defiled (2:10-11). He tells the people that "this is not your resting place", a phrase whose implications they could readily have understood. If the Promised Land is no longer their promised resting place, then by implication he is threatening to send them elsewhere. Anyone in Micah's audience who took his words seriously would have found this to be a chilling thought.

Finally, Micah confronts their love of lies, which he has already implicitly illustrated. In a piercing bit of commentary, he tells the people that the ideal prophet for them would be one who promised them as much wine and beer as they wished. As blunt as this satirical statement may be, it exposed what was in their hearts. They were still pretending to be faithful to God, and to listen to God's prophets. But they were really only willing to listen to the things that they wanted to hear, and they constantly hoped that God would accommodate their wishes, rather than having a willingness to please God.

Up to this point, Micah has been unremittingly stern in his statements to the people. It is all the more interesting, then, that he next (verses 12-13) issues one of the most encouraging and comforting passages to be found in the prophets. This will be the topic of next week's lesson.

Questions For Discussion or Study: What specific offenses does Micah list in these verses? In what ways do they illustrate the root spiritual illnesses of the people? Would Micah consider it necessary to preach any of these lessons to us? What can we learn from them?

-Mark Garner, Northland Church of Christ, Columbus, Ohio, March 2005

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WHO IS A GOD LIKE YOU? THE PROPHETIC BOOK OF MICAH

Notes For Week Four: God Will Gather the Remnant Micah 2:12-13

Although the first three chapters of Micah consist predominantly of a lengthy series of corrections, warnings, and rebukes to God's people, these two verses are an exception. In one of the most stirring passages in the prophetic books, Micah suddenly provides a glimpse of the great plan that God has for his people, in spite of their struggles and mistakes. Later in the fourth chapter of the book, Micah will discuss these same themes in more detail.

Preview

In the first three chapters of Micah, the prophet warns God's people that their worldly perspective and sinful habits have become so deeply entrenched in their hearts that God can no longer allow it to go on. The first chapter paints a bleak picture of what things will be like if and when God must discipline them. In the second chapter, Micah details the problems in their hearts that have led them to this point.

The two verses that we are studying in this lesson are a brief digression, which would give any faithful listeners a strong dose of hope, before Micah concludes his series of warnings and rebukes in chapter 3.

Like Sheep in A Pen Micah 2:12-13

This verse introduces the idea of the remnant, to which Micah will return a number of times later in the book*. Here, God promises that, no matter what might happen to his people in the short term – including the discipline that he himself may have to bring upon them – they can always be assured that God will preserve, gather, and nurture a remnant of believers. The remnant will consist of believers who continue to seek him in their hearts regardless of events around them.

* The complete list of Micah's references to the remnant is as follows: Micah 2:12, 4:7, 5:7, 5:8, and 7:18.

After a stern and rather dire series of warnings and reproofs, God now promises through the prophet that he will again gather Jacob together (2:12). The promise of bringing together the remnant is one of the vital themes in Micah's ministry. God's discipline will not be punishment for punishment's sake, but will be forward-looking, resulting in the spiritual cleansing – and, if needed, the spiritual purging – of God's people. The preservation of a remnant is important both for the sake of God's people themselves, and also for the sake of God's future plans.

God wants his people to be close to him, and for this reason he refers to his remnant as sheep in a pen, as a flock in its pasture. For their own good (that is, for our own good), God must discipline and guide his people, so that spiritual illnesses do not lead to spiritual death. He has extraordinary patience with our sins and weaknesses, and he will often allow us far more time than we really need, in the hope that we will deal with them. But he knows our hearts, and he knows that there are times when he must act or lose us. The sheep analogy, so often used in the New Testament, is quite appropriate in light of all this.

On a much larger scale, the remnant has been an important theme and an important part of God's plans throughout the spiritual history of humanity. There have been many occasions in which a similar pattern has played out, and in which God made use of a remnant to protect the future as well as the present for his people.

The many times when God has delivered or redeemed or rescued his people have usually been followed by a surge of spiritual growth, due to the gratitude and peace that follow such instances. But the time generally comes when what God has done in the past is forgotten, and then a period of spiritual decline begins. If the people allow their hearts to drift too far from God, so that they begin to become hardened, God must send discipline in some form. If he must discipline his people severely enough, he may also create a remnant, in looking ahead to the future,

It is well worth some study and thought to think about the many times when this pattern has been followed. Many of them are on quite a large scale, while at other times God used the same idea in a smaller way. The great flood described in Genesis 6-9 is a basic and very early instance of a remnant. Seeing how deeply sinful all of humanity had become, God chose and preserved a remnant through Noah, and started all over with Noah's family. He also provided Noah and his descendants with some important promises as they rebuilt.

In the Exodus from Egypt and the entry into Canaan, there is another remnant process, this time more drawn out, rather than sudden. But many of the same ideas are present: most of one generation is 'weeded out', with only a faithful handful joining a new generation to share in the promises that God made to them. Micah himself here predicts a similar series of events, which would begin during his own lifetime. God would allow his people to be conquered and enslaved by unbelieving nations, in order to nurture a remnant that would later return and rebuild.

The remnant is just as significant in the New Testament. The earliest Christians were the spiritual remnant of Israel, those who did not reject their true Savior. In fact, as Paul suggests in Romans 11, the whole church is a remnant among all the human beings that God has created. With these basic ideas in mind, you can also see how a remnant has been part of many other events, both in the Bible and throughout the spiritual history of humanity.

Questions For Discussion or Study: Describe in your own words what a 'remnant' suggests to you. Why would it ever be necessary for God to use a remnant? Under what kinds of situations would he use it? How many other biblical examples of remnants can you find? How is the remnant idea used in the New Testament? How might it occur in events after the time of the New Testament? In what ways is it still important to us now? How do we become part of the 'remnant'? (See also the notes to the next verse.)

Breaking Open the Book **Micah** □□□□□

On most of the occasions when God preserved a remnant in his people's history, he made use of devoted servants such as Noah, Joshua, and others like them, who had the faithfulness and the spiritual courage to stand firm in God's promises, even when others might weaken. Micah's prophecy here makes use of this theme, while looking far ahead to the time when the King himself would redeem God's people, and would personally lead them through the gate.

Micah promises that God will send "one who breaks open the way" (2:13). This promise of a great leader would certainly have been welcome news to an audience that had heard his stern proclamations so far. At numerous times during the history of God's people, he raised up a leader for them in their time of need. In this verse, Micah also looks ahead to the coming of the Messiah, who would bring together the remnant of Israel in a new way. Like the other leaders in the past, Jesus went ahead of everyone else, but this time not in military battle or in any other strictly physical sense. As Hebrews 6:19-20 puts it, Jesus went ahead of us into the inner sanctuary – the Most Holy Place – in order to open the way for us to enter God's presence.

This is amplified by the further statement that the people will "break through the gate". In the Old Testament, when God rebuilt through a remnant, he broke through the physical defenses of their enemies and oppressors, so that his people could enjoy freedom. In a much deeper sense, Jesus broke through the barrier that sin causes in our relationship with God, so that we can have spiritual freedom, which is even more important. And again, Jesus, like all the best leaders, both shows the way and leads the way.

As all of the above ideas indicate, there is more than one level of meaning in Micah 2:12-13. God was looking ahead to the coming exile and return, when he would use a remnant of his people to rebuild spiritually. And he was also looking even farther ahead, to the spiritual remnant that Jesus would gather together, when he provided the complete fulfillment of God's plans for Israel. The remnant is one of many examples of how God deliberately uses common themes and ideas through the ages, as a means of helping us better to understand his ways.

It is also particularly helpful to compare this passage with John 10:1-18. There are many parallels, and it seems possible that Jesus had in mind this passage from Micah, or that he hoped some of his followers would think of it. Jesus' description of himself as the 'good shepherd' closely parallels Micah's description of a leader of the sheep who have been gathered together. The sheep imagery itself is common to both passages. In both cases, the sheep are waiting in a pen for the arrival of their true leader, and when he comes, they follow him through the gate.

Jesus also spoke of gathering his flock together, just as Micah speaks of God gathering his remnant as if they were straying sheep. Amongst other points, it is significant that it is Jesus and God who initiate the gathering of the remnant. The true remnant does not seek to be a remnant, or to exalt itself by proclaiming spiritual superiority. Rather, when the time has come for a remnant to be formed, God himself gathers it together from those who have simply remained faithful. Our role is to remain faithful at all times, and to be ready for God's call, whenever it may come and in whatever form it may take.

These and other passages show us the consistency of God's plans throughout history, and they show us how much we can learn from the Old Testament history of Israel. It also helps us to see why God spoke so sternly to the people through Micah. They needed to be spiritually renewed, both for their own sakes and for the sake of the plans that God had to use them in the future.

Questions For Discussion or Study: How was verse 13 fulfilled in Old Testament history? How was it fulfilled through Jesus? Why would God make such deliberate use of these parallels? Study John 10:1-18, and see what other parallels with Micah 2:12-13 you can find. What accounts for these similarities? What lessons do they hold for us?

-Mark Garner, Northland Church of Christ, Columbus, Ohio, March 2005

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WHO IS A GOD LIKE YOU? THE PROPHETIC BOOK OF MICAH

Notes For Week Five: Leaders, Rulers, Prophets, & Priests [Micah]

In this chapter, which concludes the first major section of the book of Micah, the prophet turns to address the leaders of God's people. The rulers, the prophets, and the priests have all played an unfortunate role in the spiritual decline of the people, and Micah now warns them that their sins are harming not just themselves, but the nation as a whole.

Review of Recent Lessons

In the first three chapters, Micah discusses the sins and spiritual illnesses that have become deeply rooted in God's people. In chapter one, he warns them using vivid images and symbols. Micah himself finds the message a fearful one, but he proclaims it because it is the truth.

In chapter two, Micah explains why God needs to discipline his people. He portrays a clash of perspectives, with the people consumed with plotting and planning to acquire things of earthly value, and rejecting godly messengers like Micah. Through it all, God promises to gather and nurture a remnant. This section of Micah now concludes with Micah's words to various leaders.

To the Leaders & Rulers [Micah]

The first group that Micah addresses is those who have the civil responsibilities in Israel and Judah. God put them in their positions of authority so that they could establish justice and peace in the community, allowing God's people to worship and serve him without fear or hardship. But instead, these individuals have viewed their positions as an opportunity to follow their own selfish desires, and they have exploited the people instead of serving them.

Micah gets right to the point, reminding them that they, of all persons, should know and practice justice (3:1-3). But their priorities have become completely reversed: they hate what is good and love things that are evil. Instead of valuing justice, truth, and mercy, they are valuing selfish, sinful things. Their misuse of authority has been a major factor in the general spiritual decline.

In a series of brutal images, Micah symbolically portrays the ways that the leaders have exploited those entrusted to their care. The images of mutilation and cannibalism are uncomfortable to read, but they accurately express (figuratively) the attitudes of the authorities towards the people. In their extreme selfishness, they see the people only in terms of what they, the leaders, can get from them. Those with civil authority often find it a great temptation to accumulate 'perks' at the expense of the populace, and to enhance their power at the expense of others' liberty.

These images also show us the hardness and coldness in the rulers' hearts. They give no more thought to harming humans than they would to killing a fly. They are so selfish that they not only exploit others, but are also completely indifferent to their suffering, when they should have been the most compassionate of all towards the suffering. We all should show consideration for the hardships of others, but this is especially important for those in any kind of leadership role.

Micah tells these rulers that God will hide his face from them (3:4). The implication is that, when the time for discipline comes upon them, they may finally call out to the Lord, but it will not be for the right reasons, and hence God will turn away. This is a sad prophecy, but it proved

true. Too often in times of crisis, the leaders of Israel would cry for help without acknowledging their sin, and in such cases God regretfully but firmly ignored their pleas for help.

In one sense, this passage and the rest of Micah 3 can be easy to apply. It teaches several obvious lessons about what leaders should not do, and it warns us firmly against misusing any form of leadership or authority. But there are also a couple of helpful points to remember, which can help us to get even more out of the chapter.

The underlying point of Micah's rebukes is that godly leaders focus on their responsibilities, not on their privileges and opportunities. A godly leader could get a good start just by doing the opposite of what these persons are doing. Then, it is also helpful to remember that in one sense or another, almost all of us are leaders or will be leaders in some capacity, whether in the church, in the home, in the workplace, or in other settings. These lessons are thus pertinent for us all.

Questions For Discussion or Study: What should these rulers and leaders have valued? What did they value instead? Why does Micah describe their behavior in such graphic terms? What kinds of things might they actually have been doing? Do we ever see examples of this now? Why will God turn his face from these leaders? If they truly repent, what would God do? Who today should heed the challenges in these verses?

Sunset For the Prophets **Micah** □□□□□□

In Micah's lifetime, there were many other teachers in Israel and Judah who were also considered by the people to be prophets. A prophet's primary responsibility is to teach and explain the Word of God, but these so-called prophets were misusing their positions. For their own selfish benefit, these false prophets were teaching their audiences what they wanted to hear, rather than the truth.

The 'ministry' of these prophets was hardly the kind that God intended for them (3:5). Their efforts led the people astray, rather than bringing them closer to God. As Micah describes it, their whole 'ministry' revolved around their own needs, not the needs of others, and certainly not the truth. They induced others to give them food and gifts by proclaiming peace and giving blessings to those who paid for them. To those who would not play along, these prophets made use of threats and intimidation. All of this is far from a ministry of genuine prophecy.

The true prophet proclaims the punishment for these false prophets: night will come over them (3:6-7). The sun will set on them, and they will see no visions in the dark. What this means is that even the little amount of genuine knowledge they have will soon be taken from them. God will make it clear to all that they do not speak for him. Since this was already clear to anyone who considered what they were doing, this darkness will bring them low indeed, and they will be exposed as the frauds that they really are, even to those who once willingly followed them.

Questions For Discussion or Study: How were these false prophets leading people astray? How could they have reached this position in the first place? Describe their methods – do we see anything like this now? What discipline would come upon them? Why was it appropriate? How should we apply these verses in the church?

A Genuine Prophet & His Ministry **Micah** □□□□□□

But Micah is a genuine prophet, who proclaims only what God has called him to teach, without regard either to what he wants to believe or to what the people want to hear. Micah knows that

whatever power he has comes from God, and whatever reward he receives will come from God. He freely accepts the thankless task of preaching the Word, and he openly proclaims the grim truth to God's people, hoping that some of them will heed it.

While the other 'prophets' were filled with sin and greed, Micah was filled with the Spirit (3:8). Although he could have gone along with the others, and profited for a short time, he said, as did Joshua in an earlier generation, "as for me ...", and committed himself to God. Therefore Micah was filled with the Spirit, and with the power, strength, wisdom, and justice that the Spirit brings. Micah would not have to rely on his own knowledge or goodness or strength, but would receive what he needed from God. In this he is, of course, an encouraging example to us.

Because he knew where true power and justice come from, Micah could accept a thankless but important ministry. He was able to proclaim the people's sin, even to the leaders themselves. We can only imagine the kinds of threats and insults he received, and while his ministry bore fruit, it did not produce easy or immediate results. In fact, we today might benefit from the ministries of Micah and Isaiah even more than did many or most of their original hearers.

After expressing the contrast between himself and the phony prophets, Micah gives some concluding rebukes to all of the leaders, including the civil authorities, the priests, and the prophets (3:9-12). He accuses them all of building with a rotten foundation. Instead of basing everything on justice, truth, mercy, and faith, they were making decisions on a short-sighted, worldly, and often sinful basis, thus leading the whole nation astray.

He again mentions some specific offenses, and in particular he shows that much of what they do revolves around personal gain. The judges decide cases not on truth and justice, but on who gives them a bribe. The priests teach whatever someone will pay to hear, and the prophets even indulge in pagan rituals like fortune telling, since there are those who will pay for it.

Despite all this, they have a bizarre false hope that God will still protect them from everything. They are convinced that Micah, Isaiah, and others who warn them are simply wrong, and that God would never discipline them. This weird belief shows just how hardened they had become, and how deeply their sins had deceived them. It is no wonder that God found no alternative other than harsh discipline, in order to bring his people back to the truth.

When discipline comes, these leaders will bear the greatest responsibility. Their sins by no means excuse the rest of the people, who will also have to answer for themselves. But when Jerusalem becomes a heap of rubble, everyone will know that the rulers, prophets, and priests had a heavy responsibility. Those who lead God's people, on any level, should take their responsibilities seriously. Spiritual leadership offers great rewards, which more than compensate for the responsibility involved, but God intends the greatest rewards to be spiritual in form. He does not want the leaders of his people to use their positions for their own earthly gain.

Questions For Discussion or Study: What is the difference between Micah and the other 'prophets'? Would it have been easy to tell the difference between them? What kind of ministry was Micah given? How was he able to accept it? How could these leaders still think that God was going to protect them from harm? What kinds of responsibility do leaders have in the church? What New Testament passages would apply? Do these passages have anything in common with Micah's teachings here?

-Mark Garner, Northland Church of Christ, Columbus, Ohio, March 2005

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WHO IS A GOD LIKE YOU? THE PROPHETIC BOOK OF MICAH

Notes For Week Six: The Mountain of the Lord in Micah 4:1-4

After completing his rebuke to Israel's leaders, Micah shifts his emphasis entirely in the fourth chapter. He provides an uplifting and thought-provoking vision, as he describes the greatness of 'the mountain of the Lord', which is the place of God's presence. This prophecy, found also in Isaiah, is of great importance to God's people even today.

Overview

The first three chapters of Micah contain warnings and corrections regarding Israel's spiritual illnesses. Micah warns the people that God is coming (chapter 1). Their perspective, based on fleshly desires, clashes with God's vision for their future (chapter 2). The prophet then delivers a series of rebukes to Israel's leaders, rulers, prophets, and priests (chapter 3), since they have not been fulfilling their responsibilities with justice and truth, as God wanted them to do.

Chief Among the Mountains in Micah 4:1-4

The theme of this prophecy is the 'mountain' of God, a symbol filled with significant themes. Micah looks ahead to a time when God's kingdom will be the greatest of all kingdoms – not in a physical or earthly sense, but from a spiritual and eternal perspective. Micah is one of several prophets who explained the true nature of God's kingdom to his people.

Micah says that the mountain of the Lord will rise up in the last days (4:1a). In New Testament contexts such as Acts 2:17, Hebrews 1:2, 2 Timothy 3:1, and 2 Peter 3:3, the expression "the last days" (or sometimes, as in Jude 1:18, "the last times") refers to the entire spiritual era that began with Jesus Christ. It is 'last' in that the final conditions have been met for God to offer full and free salvation, and also in that the final preparations for God's spiritual kingdom have been made.

Isaiah and Micah had much the same sense of the phrase in mind when they prophesied about "the last days" as the time in which God's mountain would become the greatest of all 'mountains'. The prophet Hosea uses the idea in a similar way, when he compares the spiritually unfaithful people of Israel with an unfaithful wife, but then prophesies that Israel will return, and that "they will come trembling to the Lord and to his blessings in the last days" (Hosea 3:5).

Both Micah 4:1-3 and Isaiah 2:2-4 foresee the raising up of the 'mountain of the Lord's temple' (4:1b). Images involving a mountain or mountains are common in the Scriptures, and they can connote a number of ideas. A mountain suggests the obvious ideas of majesty, strength, and height. Jerusalem was built on a mountain, and Scripture references to Mount Zion, the Temple Mount, and the like often combine this literal setting with spiritually important themes.

Most directly, the 'mountain of the Lord' refers to God's presence, which in ancient Israel was found most completely in the Most Holy Place of the temple. Symbolically, here and in many other cases the image of a mountain (or mountains) can mean the nation, community, or kingdom of God's people, and/or the other nations or kingdoms of the world. Isaiah, for example, uses the idea in passages like Isaiah 40:4, 54:10, and 55:12* to combine the idea of God's power over nature with God's power over earthly domains.

* Some other examples include Isaiah 11:9, 25:6-7, 56:7, 57:13, Jeremiah 51:25, and Micah 7:12.

Thus 'the mountain of the Lord's temple', as used here, suggests God's kingdom, but not in the sense of a political or territorial kingdom. God is already the king of the earth, regardless of whether this is generally recognized or not, so he does not need to make any territorial claims. The kingdom that Micah foresaw is the spiritual kingdom of those who truly believe in God and truly follow God. Since the time of Jesus, this kingdom has been the greatest of all kingdoms or, as Micah and Isaiah put it, 'chief among the mountains' (see also the note below on Daniel 2).

In Micah's own time, this kingdom would not appear in its final form for some centuries to come. But even as he looked far into the future, Micah's words held forth the hope that God's people in his own generation could again be as strong as a mountain if they would return to God. The kingdom of God was meant for them as well, if they would take hold of the promise.

Another key aspect of this prophecy is Micah's promise that "peoples will stream to it" (4:1c). The kingdom of God was never meant to be an isolated realm, sealed off from the unclean world around it. Even in the Old Testament, we can see instances when unbelieving nations saw the light through God's people, when Israel remained faithful. The mountain itself has the drawing power, and it has the answers to the most important problems facing humanity.

Isaiah 2:2-4 is the same vision as Micah 4:1-3, though the contexts are a bit different. Isaiah 2 also comes after a series of rebukes, but proportional to the books' lengths it is much earlier in the book. In Isaiah, it is part of a longer section (Isaiah 1-6) summarizing the call and the basic message of the prophet. In Micah, it is in the middle of the book, and it is the highlight of that section. What this means is that the 'mountain' prophecy has a broad and deep significance. Isaiah mentions it as one of the foundations for understanding God's plans, ultimately fulfilled in the ministry of Jesus, while Micah proclaims it as an important goal and dream for God's people.

There is a further connection, with the prophecy of the kingdoms in Daniel 2:36-45, which also includes a 'mountain'. Daniel looks at the idea from a different perspective, as he explains to the king of Babylon that a series of earthly kingdoms would someday be demolished and replaced by a kingdom that God himself would establish. All of these prophets knew what God was planning for the future, and though their own hearers would not see the Messiah in the flesh, they were given the chance to help in laying the foundations for his ministry, with the promise of themselves seeing days of greater strength and purity in the kingdom that God had given to them.

Questions For Discussion or Study: What does 'the last days' imply? Why is it an appropriate expression? How does a mountain suggest God's presence? How can it imply a nation or kingdom? Find other verses in the prophetic books referring to mountains. Which might use it as a symbol for nation(s)? What do we learn here about the mountain of the Lord? How do other prophets help explain what Micah teaches here?

***The Mountain & the Nations* Micah** □□□□□

A significant aspect of this prophecy is the way that the 'mountain of the Lord' will draw the nations. God's plans had always looked ahead to the redemption of the Gentiles as well as the redemption of his own people, and Micah leaves no doubt that the mountain of the Lord will attract believers from many different nations. Everyone, then, will have the chance to know God and to learn from him.

Micah combines a number of ideas in saying that the law will go out from Zion (4:2). He envisions persons from many nations desiring to learn about God. As before, this finds its

complete fulfillment in Christianity, which has reached into the most distant corners of the world. ¶et even in Micah's era, when God's people were faithful they could be a light to the nations. Even great kings like Nebuchadnezzar allowed God to teach them his ways. In Micah's day, the Word of the Lord went out from Jerusalem in a literal way. In the 1st century AD, the great news of salvation in Jesus was first preached in Jerusalem, and then spread from there.

Next, Micah promises that the nations will transform their swords into plowshares (4:3), that is, they will stop using their energy and abilities to create tools of violence, and will instead devote themselves to peaceful, constructive activities. Micah portrays God as the great mediator, who brings harmony and peace instead of disputes and war. Conflict is an unfortunate but inevitable part of human society, and worldly methods to eliminate it never work for more than a very short time. But in Christ we can break down the barriers between us – it is not easy, but it is possible.

Questions For Discussion or Study: How can the mountain of the Lord draw the nations? How do they see it? Does this differ in our own time from Micah's day? What examples are there in the Old Testament of other nations being attracted to God's kingdom? How can Micah's vision in verse 3 come true in practice? How can believers help this happen?

The Mountain & Believers ¶*Micah* ¶¶¶¶¶

In figurative language, these verses remind us that, as members of God's kingdom, believers no longer need to live in fear of the things of this world, since we know that God will watch over us. Here also, the prophet reminds us to walk faithfully in the name of our God, regardless of what those around us may be doing.

To those who live on 'the mountain of the Lord', Micah promises that no one will make them afraid (4:4). The prophet sees a time when believers can sit peacefully under the shade of their own trees, knowing and trusting that God is in control. This does not mean (either then or now) that there will never be problems in the lives of believers. Rather, it is a promise that those who walk with God need no longer fear the world and its threats. As Jesus assured us, no one can snatch us out of his hand. The world can injure us, mock us, and tempt us to sin, but it will never have the power to take away our faith or to cause God to deny us. God's Word protects our minds and hearts, because we can have complete confidence in his promises.

Unlike the nations of unbelievers, we walk in the name of the Lord (4:5). By this Micah means that unbelievers follow their "gods", such as money, lust, power, and the like, since they do not know any better. These false gods do not treat their worshipers kindly, but rather ruin the lives of those who worship them. Cravings for money, power, sensual pleasure, and the like, lead only to trouble. But a desire to know God leads to blessings in many areas of life. And when we walk in the name of our God, we know also that he will be there forever. When we leave this earth, we shall lose all of our worldly possessions and accomplishments, but God is ours forever.

Questions For Discussion or Study: What protection does the prophet promise in verse 4? Does this come in a different form now than it did for his original hearers? In what ways should we apply this promise? What does Micah mean in referring to the ways that the nations follow their 'gods'? What does it mean for us to walk in the name of our God?

-Mark Garner, Northland Church of Christ, Columbus, Ohio, March 2005

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WHO IS A GOD LIKE YOU? THE PROPHETIC BOOK OF MICAH

Notes For Week Seven: More on the Remnant **Micah** ☐☐☐☐☐

After the inspiring vision and promise of the 'mountain of the Lord', Micah continues by returning to the related promise of the remnant. In these verses, the prophet provides further detail on how God will produce his remnant, and he also explains some of the things that God will call his remnant to do.

Review

The first three chapters of Micah consist primarily of warnings and corrections regarding Israel's spiritual illnesses. Before God could bless and use his people in the ways that he intended, he first needed to purify them and, if necessary, to discipline them.

The first part of Micah 4 contains the important prophecy about the 'mountain of the Lord's temple'. In the last days, this 'mountain' (symbolic of God's people, his kingdom, and his reign) will be chief among the mountains, and it will draw the nations to it. God will be the source of peace and security for all who live on the mountain and walk in his name. All of this finds its greatest fulfillment in a spiritual sense, rather than in a worldly fashion.

Assembling the Remnant Micah ☐☐☐☐☐

Here the prophet reveals some significant characteristics of the remnant. He tells us that God will bring it together from the lame, the exiles, and the grieved. It is also clear from what he says that it is God who will initiate the assembling of the remnant, from those who are waiting faithfully. And God himself will renew the strength and glory of the remnant of his people.

In revealing his plans for the remnant, God makes special mention of the lame and the exiles (4:6-7a). He is looking ahead to the time when many of his people will be taken captive to Babylon, and when he will use them, not those remaining in Israel, to rebuild the nation*. He is conscious of the trauma that his remnant must endure as part of this, and thus he makes a special promise to "those I have brought to grief" that their endurance will be worthwhile. God also refers to the lame, as a general reference to those who have suffered or who have been left out by society. God always has a special interest in such persons when they remain faithful.

* The prophet Jeremiah develops this idea in great detail. See, for example, Jeremiah 24:1-10 and 29:1-23.

As so often happens, God's plans are paradoxical by worldly standards. He deliberately chooses to rebuild through the lame and the exiles, rather than through the king and his officials, or through the wealthy, or the socially prominent, or the most brilliant scholars. Paul discusses similar principles in passages such as 1 Corinthians 1:18-31. It is not that God looks down on the powerful, or the rich, or the intelligent, but that they so often look down on him and on his people. And there is nothing inherently righteous or noble about being poor or weak or ill, but it is nevertheless true that God so often finds the greatest faith in just such persons.

God promises to take the seemingly weak and helpless and turn them into not just a remnant, but a strong nation. Once again, this proved true in ancient history, when God rebuilt the nation of Israel after the Babylonian exile, and it also proved true in an even greater way in the New

Testament church. In these and in other cases, it was very clear that God was the builder and the master, as he built through those who were more than willing to acknowledge him.

Micah also promises the restoration of the former dominion (4:7b-8). This promise would have been particularly important to the ancient Israelites, since the land of Canaan had been promised to them and their descendants forever. And God promises that he will rule them on Mount Zion 'from that day and forever'. Again, in the church this proves true in a more spiritual sense. And when God addresses the 'watchtower' and the 'stronghold' of the nation, he is not addressing inanimate objects. Rather, he is metaphorically referring to the faithful, who serve as watchtowers and strongholds in that their faithfulness and obedience protects and preserves God's people as a whole. Thus to them is given the promise of dominion and kingship.

As we have already seen several times, many of the details in this prophecy apply both in Old Testament history and in the church of Jesus. Thus, in understanding and applying Micah 4:6-13, it is helpful to keep in mind that in many cases Micah is speaking about principles, themes, or promises that are true on more than one level and in more than one instance. As one further example, note that as Christians we also have inherited dominion and kingship, though certainly not in a physical or earthly sense.

Questions For Discussion or Study: Why does God choose the lame and the exiles as the focus of the remnant? Is everyone else excluded? Why or why not? What is the significance of referring to the 'watchtower' and the 'stronghold' in this passage? Describe the various ways in which Micah's prophecies here have come true. How are they of the most significance to us?

The Life & Redemption of the Remnant Micah

Here, Micah looks ahead to the process by which God will prepare his remnant for future glory. The process will, of regrettable necessity, bring hardship and sacrifice upon those whom God has chosen. But always before them will be his promise of rescue and redemption, whether the oppressor is Babylon, some other nation, or sin itself.

In asking God's people what is wrong (4:9), Micah is posing a rhetorical question. Right now, they do not perceive that there is anything wrong, but that time will come soon enough. He describes a people who have no king or counselor because, although officially there is of course a king plus plenty of counselors in the land, the people have strayed from God, their true king and counselor. What is true now in a spiritual sense will soon become true in a literal sense when they are disciplined by foreign invaders*. The prophet uses the image of labor pains to describe the feeling of helpless agony that will come out when the people finally realize how helpless they are without God. He uses this image because of the acute pain it brings, and also because he will develop the idea further in the following verse.

* In Micah's lifetime, the Assyrians would invade and conquer the Northern Kingdom (Samaria), and would then attack and besiege Jerusalem. In a later generation, the Babylonians would conquer Jerusalem and the Southern Kingdom. See the notes to Week One for further historical background information.

Micah continues by describing the agony and rescue that lie ahead for God's people (4:10). Once again, he uses the image of labor pains to describe the forthcoming agony. The image is significant because, although labor pains can be excruciating, they lead to something worthwhile. In the same way, when God disciplines the faithful, it is never the end, but only a means to make

them stronger, more faithful, and more pleasing and useful to him. Jesus himself used this same image of labor pains in John 16:19-24, shortly before the crucifixion.

The prophet goes on to describe the kind of discipline by which God would have to purify the remnant for the future. This would not happen in Micah's day, because under King Hezekiah the nation of Judah returned to God, and so it was a later generation that was taken captive to Babylon. They did indeed leave the city to camp in the open field, as Micah predicted. But they took with them the promise of redemption and rescue, as Micah and Isaiah foresaw, and as Jeremiah, who lived to see the downfall of Judah, reminded everyone when it happened.

Questions For Discussion or Study: Why does the prophet ask them what is wrong? How can we apply this? What does the image of labor pains indicate? In what way or ways was this fulfilled? What details are revealed here about God's plans for his remnant? What would Micah's listeners have learned from this? What should we get out of it?

□ *hat the Future* □ *ods* *Micah* □□□□□□□□

These verses depict the conflict between God's people and the unbelieving nations of the world. Micah's description can be applied to the coming exile and return, or to the New Testament church of Christ, or, in a general way, to the perpetual struggle between the church and the world. God forewarns us that the godly will always encounter opposition from the world, yet he also assures us of ultimate victory.

Although the future for God's people is secure, the present will see a gathering of hostile nations (4:11-12). Their intentions are destructive and malicious, as they wish to see God's people defiled and destroyed. □et, even in their determination to sin, God will use them in spite of themselves. The prophet points out that they do not understand God's thoughts or God's plans. Even as they pursue their selfish goals, God will use them as part of his own plan. The feared Assyrians and, later, the renowned Babylonians would both be mere tools of discipline in God's hands. When they have accomplished his purpose for them, they will be gathered like sheaves to the threshing floor□their conquests will be taken from them, and God's people will be restored.

With all this in mind, Micah tells God's people to "rise and thresh" (4:13), as they are the true heirs of the land. In comparison, the world's empires are nothing. Micah's images of iron horns and bronze hooves symbolize the divine power that God provides his people. Our weapons may often be of little value in accomplishing earthly goals, and they may be despised and mocked by the world, but they have "divine power to demolish strongholds" and to "demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God" (2 Corinthians 10:4,5). When we use God's power for the wrong purposes, we can become frustrated. But if we use it as he wills, eventual victory is assured. God promises that we shall devote to him the world's wealth. It is his, of course, to begin with, but in him we can prove this to an unbelieving world.

Questions For Discussion or Study: Why have the nations gathered against God's people? When did this or will this occur? What did they think they were doing? Why did God permit them to pursue their own goals? If they were against God's people, how was God able to use them? How do we "devote their ill-gotten gains to the Lord"?

-Mark Garner, Northland Church of Christ, Columbus, Ohio, □pril 2005

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WHO IS A GOD LIKE YOU? THE PROPHETIC BOOK OF MICAH

Notes For Week Eight: The Victorious Remnant Micah

This chapter provides even further details about God's plans for his remnant. In it, we see the remnant emerge victorious from its struggles and from the attacks of the ungodly. As in the previous chapter, the images and symbols in this chapter find application both in ancient Israel and in the New Testament church.

Review

In the fourth and fifth chapters of Micah, the prophet turns from his warnings and stern corrections regarding Israel's sins, and provides a sweeping vision of what God wants for his people. Like Isaiah, he prophesied about the 'mountain of the Lord's temple' becoming chief among the mountains (4:1-5). Micah prophesied that the nations would be drawn to it, and that the people of God could enjoy peace and security on the 'mountain'.

Micah then proceeds to tell us more about the remnant of God's people (Micah 4:6-13). He tells us that God will assemble the remnant from the lame, the exiles, and the grieving. He foretells the exile and redemption of the remnant, and he details what the future holds, in that God's people will need to survive, through God's care and grace, a hostile gathering of the nations.

A Promised Future Micah

This passage contains what is perhaps Micah's best-known prophecy, as he foretells the coming of a future ruler of Israel from the town of Bethlehem. The entire passage, though, is of interest, both as the context for this prophecy and for its significance in explaining some further details about God's plans for his people.

Micah has just prophesied the eventual victory of God's people over the worldly nations, but he reminds them that there is also a coming siege (5:1). This refers to the attack on Jerusalem in 701 BC* by the Assyrians under King Sennacherib. This is a key event in the Old Testament, described in no fewer than three different books (2 Kings 18:13-19:37, 2 Chronicles 32:1-23, and Isaiah 36:1-37:38). During the attack, the Assyrians made a special effort to mock and ridicule Judah's King Hezekiah, and to undermine the people's confidence in him, which is what Micah implied in saying that they would strike Israel's ruler on the cheek (that is, insult him).

* The Assyrians had completed their conquest of the Northern Kingdom in 722 BC, and afterwards they decided to dominate Judah as well. They demanded large payments in return for not attacking Judah, and when Hezekiah finally decided no longer to endure this extortion, they did attack and besiege Jerusalem.

In discussing this crisis, which lay in the future but not the distant future, Micah suddenly turns to a different matter, promising that out of the town of Bethlehem would come a new ruler in the name of God (5:2). Micah refers to Bethlehem Ephrathah as an insignificant clan, which had been a non-factor whenever a show of strength was called for. Yet it is something different that this town has to offer, as the ancestral town of King David, and thus of the kingly lineage of Judah. Note that Micah does not refer to this coming savior as a king, but simply as a ruler. This is significant when we remember that Jesus very pointedly declined to be a king in an earthly sense, but instead sought to be a spiritual leader and ruler.

The fulfillment of this prophecy is, of course, found in Jesus. In fact, it became well-known amongst the ancient Jews that Micah referred to the Messiah here. When the siege predicted in verse 1 came to pass, it then became clear that this promised ruler was not to deliver them from the siege, but would instead come later. This was obvious because of the way that God rescued them from Sennacherib's troops, by miraculous means that did not even require God's people to strike a blow. Even King Hezekiah's role in the rescue was confined to humbling himself, admitting his powerlessness, and turning to God for help.

This promise of the Messiah coming from Bethlehem is an exception to the many prophecies whose fulfillment is found both in the prophet's own time and, in a fuller sense, in Jesus or in the church. Micah did have an immediate reason, though, for mentioning it here. To a discerning listener, Micah was promising that God's people would never perish or disappear—they could not, because God had all these plans for them in the future. Micah very openly indicates, in this chapter and elsewhere, that these plans center on the remnant, not on all who were currently part of the nation, and that along the way there would be many instances of discipline.

Micah also depicts the coming ruler as the shepherd of the flock (5:3-5). Much of what he says indicates that these visions will find their complete fulfillment only in the more distant future. For he sees a period in which Israel will be abandoned, that is, will live under domination and even oppression by pagan nations. In fact, from Micah's lifetime until the time of Jesus, there were only short periods in which the Israelites were not either under foreign rule or at least threatened and heavily influenced by it.

The prophet also sees a 'birth', and in saying so he makes a connection with his mentions of 'labor pains' in the previous chapter. God's people would have to go through these labor pains, and would be largely abandoned* until the time had come for Jesus to bring together the remnant of Israel, from all the places to which they had been scattered. Then he would stand and shepherd his flock, an image used many times to refer to his spiritual guidance. He would also bring peace and security, though on a much deeper and spiritual level than the people of Micah's day probably wished for.

* In addition to the constant threats from unbelieving nations, there was a lengthy period, lasting from about 430 BC until the writing of the first books of the New Testament in the mid-1st century AD, when there was no revelation of inspired writings to God's people.

Questions For Discussion or Study: Why would Micah tell the people about the coming siege? What response did he seek? What was his purpose in sharing details about the Messiah in connection with predicting this crisis? What details do we learn here about Jesus' ministry? Would they have meant anything to Micah's listeners?

The Conquering Remnant Micah

The remnant will not only survive, but will prosper. It will not only prosper, but will conquer its spiritual enemies. These verses combine a bold promise of the remnant's victory with a stern proclamation of eventual doom for those who oppose God. Once again, these verses are applicable on more than one level, finding both historical and spiritual fulfillment.

Micah returns to the concern that will arise in the near future, namely, attack from the Assyrians (5:5b-6). Once again, he foretells of the invasion and siege that would come fairly soon. He also

describes, in a figurative sense, how they will defend against the siege. In saying that they will raise "seven shepherds, even eight leaders of men", Micah is not being literal. This kind of expression simply suggested 'many', in contrast to the way in which God usually worked when he did send a deliverer, who was generally singular.

The prophet is saying that this time will be different. Instead of God raising up a leader for them, they will all stand in faith against the enemy, in the confidence of God's deliverance. This is, in fact, what happened: for once, the people stood together behind Hezekiah, and as a result of his entreaties through Isaiah, God delivered them miraculously. Likewise, in foreseeing that God's people would rule over Assyria, Micah is not being literal. As in Daniel's explanation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream, the people of God crush the kingdoms of the world by allowing God to reveal their inherent weakness and instability.

Micah now turns once more to the theme of the remnant, and in particular, he describes its future when it is found among the unbelieving nations, rather than having its own country (5:7-9). In the midst of many peoples of different religions and different cultures, God's remnant would be a witness to the true, living God, and would be a source of light to those who sought it. This is clearly meant to be true now through the church of Christ, but it was also true throughout the many years of Old Testament history in which the Israelites lived under foreign rule.

The prophet describes the role of the remnant with two very different images. First, he says it will be like dew or showers, natural processes that come and go in ways entirely beyond human control. In the same way, no human or group of humans can control or generate or organize God's remnant. God himself will assemble it and guide it. The other image is more violent, as Micah compares the remnant to a lion let loose amongst other animals. In such a case, the lion would clearly dominate and even devour the others. In a much different sense, the remnant has a power available to it on a scale that dwarfs the greatest and most feared of worldly nations or armies. We do not rampage over such worldly forces in a literal sense, but we can bring them to shame and repentance by allowing God's power and light to shine through us.

In the next few verses, Micah pronounces doom for the idols (5:10-15). The images in this passage portray the destruction of the idols' sources of strength (such as the armies that spread their influence), and finally the destruction of the idols themselves. The imagery in these verses is rather violent, and may even seem vicious, but note that what God wills and proclaims is not the destruction of idolaters so much as the destruction of the idols themselves. This will, though, create painful deprivations for a time for those who worshiped and relied upon these idols. But God knows that there is but one cure for idolatry: the idols must be smashed to pieces.

Questions For Discussion or Study: How would God's people defeat the Assyrians when they invaded? How does Micah foretell this? In what ways can we apply the lessons from what happened in the siege of 701 BC? What do the two images in verses 7-9 tell us about the remnant? How did they apply to ancient Israel? How do they apply to us? What lessons should we learn from Micah's imagery of idol smashing in verses 10-15?

-Mark Garner, Northland Church of Christ, Columbus, Ohio, April 2005

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WHO IS A GOD LIKE YOU? THE PROPHETIC BOOK OF MICAH

Notes For Week Nine: Let the Hills Hear Micah ☐☐☐☐

Micah has confronted the sinfulness and spiritual sicknesses of God's people, and he has also described God's vision of what he wants for his people. Now the prophet calls the people to consider where they are, and where they could be. In this passage and in the rest of the book, Micah provides the people with what they need in order to change and to grow closer to God.

Review God's Vision & Plans For His People Micah ☐☐☐☐

In the previous two chapters, Micah has set forth some important aspects of the vision that God has for his people. His vision stands in sharp contrast with their present spiritual state of decay. The prophet speaks about the 'mountain of the Lord's temple' being raised above all others (Micah 4:1-5). This promise foresees God's people being made into a great spiritual kingdom based on God's Word and power, a kingdom that will attract the nations to it. Micah also details the role of the remnant of faithful, humble believers, in bringing this about (Micah 4:6-13).

Micah continues by discussing the remnant victorious (Micah 5). This was fulfilled in different ways in the short term and in the long term. This passage foresees the promised ruler from Bethlehem, fulfilled in Jesus. There will also be a coming siege at the hands of the Assyrians, from which God will deliver them. God also promises the destruction of idols.

Starting the Road Back Micah ☐☐☐☐☐☐

Once again, the prophet abruptly changes tone. Immediately after the promises of victory in the fifth chapter, he turns back to the people and challenges them to defend themselves before God and his creation. This is not, of course, a literal call for them to do so, but rather a rhetorical device to introduce some ideas that can help them start on the road back to closeness with God.

God first addresses his people as if they were in a courtroom, calling on them to plead their case (6:1-2). This is really a call to self-examination, and not a literal call to appear in a court setting. Nor does God actually even want them to present a defense: in fact, they have no defense, and they have no case to plead. Rather, he wants them to humble themselves, so that they can see their need for him.

In calling the hills, mountains, and all of nature as 'witnesses', God appeals to his people's sense of what is right. Nature itself testifies to God's wisdom and might, and nature's permanence also stands in contrast to the mortality and inconstancy of human beings. God's 'case' against his people is not so much a list of crimes or offenses, but rather the ways that they have broken faith with him and with each other, by straying in their hearts and forgetting his covenant with them.

God soon abandons the courtroom parallel, and turns to his people on an entirely personal level. He asks them, "how have I burdened you?" (6:3-4). God asks what he may have done, how he may have let them down, to make them want to drift away from him and disobey so many of his commands. In fact, as God knows, the problem is not that he has displeased them, but rather that they have forgotten the things he did for them in the past. He asks them to remember the exodus from Egypt and their deliverance from slavery. He redeemed them, and then provided them with

spiritual leadership under Moses, Aaron, and Miriam. There is also a close parallel for us, in that God brought us out of our 'Egypt' of slavery to sin, redeemed us through the blood of his son, and gave us his Spirit to guide us into all truth. So we also, like the Israelites in Micah's lifetime, ought to make every effort to remind ourselves of the salvation that God has given to us.

Micah also points out two more historical episodes that the people should consider and remember (6:5). He first calls them to remember the desire of Balak, king of Moab, to have Israel cursed by the prophet Balaam (described at length in Numbers 22-24). Although Balaam was the kind of amoral prophet-for-hire that Micah confronted in his own ministry, even he was not able to curse God's people, instead blessing them, against his own economic interests. Soon afterwards, though, Balaam was punished for his many mercenary uses of his talents and for his role in tempting the Israelites into idolatry and immorality (Numbers 31). Balaam is used as this kind of bad example in passages like 2 Peter 2:15 and Jude 1:11.

Micah mentions Balaam and Balak not only because Balaam is an example of one of the abuses that he has condemned in his ministry, but even more so because of the importance of this incident in the journey of Israel to the Promised Land. The attempts of Balak and Balaam to stop the Israelites occurred at Shittim, the last stop in the wilderness before entering Canaan (see also below), and they coincided with the temptations to immorality offered by the Moabites and Midianites. Thus, even near the last stage before finally entering Canaan, spiritual danger threatened to derail the people again. But God delivered them, and kept them from enduring another agonizing period of wandering in the desert. Micah is saying that, when God's people are willing to remain faithful, no one can snatch them away from their God. Only if we ourselves choose to drift away from God will it happen.

The prophet also mentions this final journey from Shittim to Gilgal, as they entered the Promised Land. From Shittim, the last stop in the desert*, they sent out the spies to Canaan, and then went across the Jordan when God dried up the waters for them. As they walked across the riverbed, they took twelve stones from the middle of the Jordan. Then they set them up at Gilgal, where they made camp on the other side after crossing over**. Micah's application is that, once again, God did whatever was necessary to move them past all obstacles, as long as they were responsive to him and his commands.

* See Numbers 25:1, Joshua 2:1, and Joshua 3:1, and the summary of Israel's wanderings in Numbers 33.

** This sequence of events is described in Joshua 3:1-5:9.

Questions For Discussion or Study: Why does God address his people as if they were in court? What is the significance of calling the mountains and hills as 'witnesses'? What is God's 'case'? What is he really looking for from his people in these verses? What is the purpose of reminding them of the Exodus, the episode with Balak and Balaam, and the entry into the Promised Land? How do all three of these events fit together?

Coming Before the Lord Micah □□□□□

The people must begin the road back to God by once again living in the awareness of his presence. To do this, they must in turn improve their understanding of what God wants from them. In this respect, their spiritual needs are similar to those of many Christians who have drifted away from God, and who then have allowed guilt and doubt to prevent them from returning to him.

When Micah poses the question, "with what shall I come before the Lord?" (6:6-7), he is really asking a rhetorical question. He knows what God wants, but the people have forgotten. They felt that they needed to bring something when coming into God's presence, but they had lost sight of what mattered most to him. They had long since begun to treat God's presence as a formality, and their worship of him as a mechanical routine governed by set rules.

Micah begins by reminding them of the need to bow down in humility before God. Before anything else can have value before God, we must humble ourselves in his presence. Only then can we consider what he might want from us, and arrive at the right response. Micah suggests that burnt offerings, though required by law, will not in themselves please God*. After all, he can always take as many rams, calves, and vessels of oil that he wants.

* Compare this passage with Hebrews 10:1-10 (which also quotes from Psalm 40:6-8).

For rhetorical effect, Micah asks if even a human sacrifice could cleanse us from our guilt. This shocking question is not, of course, a serious proposal, but rather a way of dramatizing the ineffectiveness of our sacrifices and acts of goodness in providing permanent forgiveness for our sins. Micah's suggestion also deliberately creates the connection with God's willingness to sacrifice his own Son, which truly was effective in cleansing us of sin.

The prophet then tells his hearers that God has already showed us what he requires (6:8). His message is a simple one in theory, yet a very difficult one to practice. Like Jesus' answer about the 'greatest commandment', Micah's teaching here encompasses many specific applications that flow from and hang on these principles.

Micah first of all says that we must act justly. This calls for us to be honest, sincere, and sensitive in our dealings with each other. It means that we must not ask for more than our fair share, and must accept the equal importance of every person in the sight of God. He also calls us to love mercy - not just to practice it, but to embrace it and treasure it, as it is the foundation of all good, genuinely loving relationships. Without the willingness to forgive and grant grace, relationships run into constant problems. Perhaps most of all, we are told to walk humbly with our God. Humility will, in turn, help us in developing the other qualities that Micah has called for. These three principles are simply stated, but they can take a lifetime to put into practice.

Questions For Discussion or Study: Why does Micah ask what he needs to have in order to come before God? What did he want the people to think about? If sacrifices have such limited usefulness, why did they need to be made? Compare verse 8 with Jesus' teachings on the 'greatest commandment'. How do they fit together? What do they have in common? Why are they stated in different ways?

-Mark Garner, Northland Church of Christ, Columbus, Ohio, April 2005

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WHO IS A GOD LIKE YOU? THE PROPHETIC BOOK OF MICAH

Notes For Week Ten: The Lord is Calling Micah ☐☐☐☐☐☐

In these verses, God continues his appeal to his people. He calls them to consider where they are spiritually, and to re-adjust their perspective so that they can draw closer to him. He warns them that those who do not heed Micah's message will find their lives becoming increasingly frustrating. The prophet also expresses his own dependence on God and his own need for God.

☐review

The first three chapters of Micah consist of a series of warnings and corrections regarding Israel's spiritual struggles. In the fourth and fifth chapters, Micah describes God's vision for his people, as he wants them to be. The final two chapters then provide some lessons for those who are ready to change, to help them to return to God.

Saying, "let the hills hear" (Micah 6:1-8), God speaks to his people as if they were on trial in a courtroom, pleading their case. His real intent is to get them to realize their need to start out along the road back to God. They need to consider his constant love for them, and to remember the ways he has worked in their past history to provide for their needs. Micah also tells them that, to live in God's presence, what they need most of all is not to offer sacrifices, but to act justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with their God.

Take heed Micah ☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐

In these verses, God essentially tells his people that it is time for them either to change or to begin to experience the consequences of having wandered away from him in their hearts. He reminds them that he simply can no longer overlook their sinful perspective, and he then outlines what will happen to them if they still refuse to listen to Micah's message.

The prophet reminds his hearers that to fear God's name is wisdom (6:9-12). God is calling for them to change and to heed him, and those who are wise will listen. Although God would like to deal with them in love and compassion, right now he must appear before them with a rod of correction, in the hope that they will finally pay attention to him. As Micah indicates, he wants them to focus their thoughts on him, not just on the discipline itself.

As he reminds them of their deep-rooted sin, it is interesting that he emphasizes not any spectacular or lurid sin, but instead convicts them of their shabby, shameful ways of cheating each other through the use of false measuring units (of which the "ephah" is one) and dishonest scales. These cheap, dishonorable tactics reveal what is in their hearts even more than some shocking sin would have done.

God tells them that the end result of faithlessness will be an unfulfilled life (6:13-16). The coming ruin will eventually culminate in defeat and captivity, but here God tells them that the process of discipline has already begun. There often comes a time when God must actively punish those whose hearts are hard, but even before then, sinners pay the price for their sins in

more subtle ways. Those who ignore God's ways and words find their lives gradually becoming less fulfilling, as Micah implies here.

The prophet describes a life of eating without finding satisfaction, planting but not harvesting, and storing up but never accumulating. This is a way of characterizing the steadily decreasing pleasure and fulfillment to be found in the self-centered, fleshly life. All of the things that give us happiness and pleasure came originally from God, and "everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, because it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer" (1 Timothy 4:4-5). But the more that God's blessings and gifts are misused, and the more they are unappreciated, the less satisfaction they provide.

The exhortation closes with the convicting statement that God's people have followed in the footsteps of Omri and Ahab, two of Israel's vilest kings*. On the surface, the people may not have been as idolatrous and evil as those two had been, but on the inside, they were little different, because of the selfish and foolish desires in their hearts.

* See 1 Kings 16:21-22:40 for the Bible's account of their reigns. Omri was the king who established Samaria as the capital of the Northern Kingdom, and in his day he seems to have been well-respected by other nations. Foreign inscriptions have even been found that call Israel "the land of Omri". But notice that the biblical account gives him little prominence, instead simply detailing his spiritual failings.

Questions For Discussion or Study: What does it mean to fear God's name? Why is this wise? What response is the prophet looking for in verses 9-12? What characterizes the kinds of petty sins described in verses 10-11? Why does Micah refer to them here? What is he describing in verses 13-15? How does this happen in practice? What does it signify? How can we guard against it?

***The Prophet's Misery & Hope* Micah** □□□□□

As Micah faithfully proclaims God's words to his people, he is keenly aware of what is at stake. His own feelings are a mixture of discouragement and hope. When he sees the rampant sin around him, he despairs of finding anyone who will listen to God. But he also maintains a strong faith in God, and this brings him hope, since he is certain of God's wisdom, love, and power.

The prophet openly and honestly acknowledges his own misery as he sees the spiritual state of God's people, exclaiming, "what misery is mine" (7:1-4). In a vivid figure of speech, he compares himself to someone looking for fruit that is out of season, having a craving for a taste that cannot be found. He is describing the same spiritual hunger that Jesus had in mind* in the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:6), a hunger that comes from the heart of those who love God and who want to see others come to love God as well.

* Compare this also with Jesus' curse upon the fig tree in Matthew 21:18-22 and Mark 11:12-14, 20-21. There are some spiritual themes in these passages that can help explain the point that Jesus was making in this incident, which is often a source of confusion to readers of the gospels.

As did other prophets and men of God before him, Micah bemoans the fact that there seems not to be a single upright man remaining in the land. While this and some of the other statements in these verses may not be literally true, he says this as a way of describing the obvious eagerness to sin that he sees all around him. The people are sinning without shame, without reluctance, and

without fear of retribution. But the "day of their confusion" has now arrived. They have been lulled into a false sense of security by God's very patience and love for them, and the first obvious signs of discipline will come as a shock to them, just as they always do to those with hearts that have become hardened to their own sin and to their need for God.

Micah follows this with a warning to live cautiously in the spiritually troubled times of his day (7:5-6). He tells them to be very careful about trusting even neighbors, friends, and family. He means this in a spiritual sense: the entire community has lost its focus on God, and there are few (if any) good examples to follow or good influences to recommend. In such times it is particularly important to develop a focus on God himself, and a reliance on him alone.

The prophet's description of divisions in the home calls to mind the similar passages in the gospels. Just as the Messianic ministry of Jesus divided the Jews, so Micah knows that his own message will lead to divisions. Neither Jesus nor the prophets wanted to cause division, but it was an unavoidable by-product. Just as some of the Israelites in the first century AD believed Jesus and some did not, some of them will accept Micah's call to repentance and some will not. And in both cases, those who reject the message are quite likely to put pressure upon those who do accept it, hoping to change their minds.

Micah himself is committed to hopeful watching (7:7). In saying "as for me ...", just as he said in Micah 3:8, he is resolving not to let other humans be his standard. He cares for them, and he hopes that they will heed the warning he is giving them. But he knows that it is God who hears his cries and who knows his spiritual needs. And it is God alone who has both the power and the willingness to save those who want to come to him.

Questions For Discussion or Study: What is it that troubles Micah so much? How does he express his feelings? Are we able to understand or to sympathize with him? How can we learn from his personal example? What applications should we make from verses 5-6? Find the passages where Jesus makes similar statements. How are they similar? Are their differences in emphasis? How can we put into practice the attitude of hopeful watching that the prophet describes in verse 7?

-Mark Garner, Northland Church of Christ, Columbus, Ohio, May 2005

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WHO IS A GOD LIKE YOU? THE PROPHETIC BOOK OF MICAH

Notes For Week Eleven: Into the Light Micah ☐☐☐☐☐

As the book nears its conclusion, the prophet begins to put a choice before his listeners. They can no longer expect God to sit by patiently while they continue to harden their hearts and indulge their fleshly desires. God is about to act, and his light will soon reveal the spiritual truth. His people must choose whether to come into his light voluntarily or involuntarily.

Review

After the warnings and corrections in chapters 1-3, and the spiritual promises in chapters 4-5, Micah turns in the final two chapters to a discussion of God's people and their relationship with God, to help them to start on the road to spiritual renewal. He begins (6:1-8) with courtroom imagery designed to show them that they have no defense before God. He follows with a series of historical remembrances, and then calls them to act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly.

In Micah 6:9-7:7, the Lord calls his people to heed him, warning them of coming discipline and of the unfulfilled lives lived by the unfaithful. Micah himself speaks on behalf of those who have remained faithful, expressing his spiritual hunger, his cautious attitude towards those around him, and his hopeful watching as he waits for God to work.

Waiting For God's Light Micah ☐☐☐☐☐☐☐

In these verses, Micah speaks as if he were the personification of all of God's people. He contemplates their sin, their suffering, and their anticipation of God's help, with particular emphasis on the personal side of their relationship with God. More than the specific blessings or the acts of discipline that come from God, he focuses his attention on the light that God brings.

Micah presents himself as one* sitting in the darkness (7:8), just as the people are currently in spiritual darkness. He endures the gloating of enemies who can perceive the vulnerability and shame of God's people. In fact, Micah already feels this sense of reproach keenly, while the rest of the nation will feel it soon. Yet Micah knows that after the discipline, no matter how severe, the nation will rise again. When this happens, they will see that it is God who is their light and their hope. They will no longer try to come out of the darkness under their own power, but instead will look to God. This indeed is one of the basic lessons that God wants them to learn.

* In the original Hebrew text, the form of the possessive pronoun in verse 10 shows that the speaker in this passage is actually feminine, implying a feminine personification of God's people. One commentator used the description "Lady Jerusalem" to describe the idea that Micah has in mind. See also the note to verse 10.

Another spiritual lesson that they will learn is to hope in God (7:9). They will learn to set aside their selfishness and self-centeredness so that they can trust God in all things. Notice the numerous forms of trusting God that are mentioned in this verse alone. First, the people honestly accept their sinfulness and the discipline that comes with it. They also make the crucial step of trusting God to justify them and to renew them, rather than attempting to demonstrate their own righteousness. They will thus be brought out into the light, and will be able to enjoy the blessings that come with living in God's presence.

Another certainty is the downfall of the worldly (7:10). The personified speaker has already referred to a spiteful enemy, and this enemy is now shown to be doomed to suffer the same kind of shame over which she* herself has just taunted God's people. The image of being trampled in the mire emphasizes that, to God, separation from God and the shame of one's own sin are far more severe penalties than are physical suffering or material loss.

* Taken on a literal level, this passage depicts two women, one of whom behaves spitefully and jealously towards the other. The implication is that these two are rivals for the opportunity to possess what is God's. The worldly try to get it by demeaning and taunting the faithful, while the faithful come to realize that the greatest blessings will come through humility and grace.

Questions For Discussion or Study: Why does Micah speak in the first person (I) in these verses? What important spiritual realizations does he describe? How does he mean for them to be applied? Why are these particular realizations so important in our relationship with God? What lessons should we get from them? Why does the prophet lay such emphasis on the shame to be suffered by the enemies of God's people?

A Bright Future *Micah*

God promises his people that after the coming discipline they will experience not only renewal and a fresh start, but also a bright future. They will rebuild and will enjoy a new peace and security. Micah's words connect the future with the past, recalling long-past idyllic days when God's people had been faithful. As this shows, God sees the ultimate fulfillment of these promises on a spiritual level.

In foreseeing a time for building (7:11-13), Micah is promising that the day will come when God's people are re-established in security and blessing. Building walls and extending boundaries are tasks for a city that has become strong enough to stand on its own. He also gives a vision of peoples coming from Egypt all the way to the Euphrates, and even beyond. This parallels the image in chapter four of nations streaming to the mountain of the Lord, and it has essentially the same meaning. The prophet also foretells the desolation of worldly powers, again intending this on a spiritual level, just as Daniel also foresaw God's kingdom defeating and shaming the kingdoms of the world.

To all this is added the image of God shepherding the flock (7:14-15). To describe God (or Jesus) as a shepherd, and his people as sheep, is one of the Bible's most frequent images in its depictions of our relationship with God, and Micah himself has already used it earlier in the book. Here he sees the sheep roaming in peaceful forests and grazing in fertile pasturelands, led and protected by their God and shepherd.

In referring to "days long ago" at the end of verse 14, Micah recalls the first entry into the Promised Land, a time of joyful fulfillment of God's promises. God himself rejoiced that, after the Exodus generation turned their hearts away from him who had led them out of Egypt, he could finally give his people the rich blessings that he had so long ago prepared for them. In the same way, Micah is looking ahead to a new generation, a remnant, of God's people who will appreciate and enjoy the spiritual blessings that the present generation barely notices. To them God will display his wonders when the time is right, and he will leave no doubt that he is their God and their source of light and life.

Questions For Discussion or Study: What is the significance of promising a day of building walls? What similar promises might we have? What does the image of God as our shepherd signify? What does Micah want to imply with it here? To what kind of wonders is Micah referring in verse 15?

Coming Out Reluctantly Micah □□□□□□□□

Unbelievers will also be brought into the light. But unlike those who remain faithful, they will be driven out reluctantly and under compulsion. They too will see God's wonders, but instead of being encouraged by them, they will be terrified. Micah presents his listeners with a clear choice, assuring them that in either case they will indeed come into God's light.

Just as God will show his wonders to the faithful, the nations, too, will see them (7:16-17). They will realize that their power, next to God's, is insignificant, and they will feel helpless and humbled. When we realize just how extraordinary God's power is, it can be either a tremendous source of encouragement or a cause of despair and fear. To the faithful, nothing is as comforting as the thought that our heavenly Father can always act on our behalf whenever it is truly needed. To the faithless, it is a horrifying thought to have to admit that there is a power greater than they.

The imagery in verse 17 stands in convicting contrast with the picture of the believers in verses 8-9. In those earlier verses, God brought his people into the light through his patience, mercy, and love. But here, the unbelievers are desperately trying to hide in dens, and are apparently reduced (figuratively) to a lifestyle of crawling and foraging. In their desire to hide from God's presence, they have accepted hardships far worse than their imaginary fears of God.

And it is in vain anyway, for as so many examples in the Scriptures show us, it is impossible to hide from God. They are forced out into the light after all. God's light means joyful life to believers, but it makes willful unbelievers miserable. Instead of embracing God and his promises, they turn to him only out of fear and necessity. We can save ourselves much trouble and pain if we abandon our reluctance to draw close to God, and come willingly into the light.

Questions For Discussion or Study: How is it possible to have such different reactions to God's wonders? Are there examples of this in the Scriptures? What determines whether we come to him willingly or reluctantly? Why don't the ungodly want to come into the light? Does God feel differently towards them than he does towards those who come willingly? What other passages in the Bible discuss this? What overall lessons should we learn from this passage?

-Mark Garner, Northland Church of Christ, Columbus, Ohio, May 2005

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WHO IS A GOD LIKE YOU? THE PROPHETIC BOOK OF MICAH

Notes For Week Two: *Ye: You Will Again Have Compassion* Micah 6:1-8

The book of Micah closes with a renewed emphasis on one of its most vital themes. The prophet turns to address God directly, combining praise and plea in recognizing God's great compassion and mercy. He also acknowledges our absolute dependence on these divine qualities. The message is clear—God is always ready to remain true to his promises, whenever we turn to him.

Review of Recent Lessons

In the last two chapters, Micah focuses on what God's people must do to renew their relationship with God, and to be able to fulfill his plans for them. He calls them to "plead their case" before the hills, implying that they truly have no case before God (Micah 6:1-8). He calls them to take heed, warning them of the eventual lack of satisfaction that faithless living brings. Micah himself feels out of place in such a sinful generation, but he watches in hope for God (6:9-7:7).

In Micah 7:8-17, the prophet foresees the time in the future when God's light will illuminate all things. For now, God's people wait in the darkness, but they can hope in God as their source of light and deliverance. God also promises a time of building, with himself as their shepherd, recalling the days long past when his people lived in peace and security. But while God's people will come willingly into the light, the unbelieving nations will find God's light to be harsh and frightening, and they will only come into it reluctantly.

God's Remarkable Character Micah 6:1-8

This verse, one of the most memorable in the book, celebrates God's remarkable character while implicitly declaring our hope to be in him and him alone. God's eagerness to forgive us and to pardon us shows how different his nature is from ours, and it also makes him stand out from the various false gods and false religions that humanity has constructed.

In asking, "who is a God like you?" (7:18), Micah is rejoicing in God's character. The quality of grace, so essential to our relationship with God, is not what most humans expect in a God so powerful and righteous. Micah wants us to appreciate how fortunate we are to have been offered pardon and forgiveness for our sins against God. It is hard for us to comprehend just what it took to make this possible, and it is equally challenging to understand that we truly are the "remnant of his inheritance", the adopted sons and daughters of God himself. Yet even a basic awareness of these extraordinary facts can make a difference in our relationship with God.

Micah also knows that, while God is presently angry because of the crude sins of his people, his anger is brief and his mercy is lasting. As Christians, we also know that God's own Son accepted the brunt of the suffering that was due us for our own sins against God. Jesus offered himself willingly and lovingly, as a final, conclusive example of God's eagerness to show grace. Even human rulers do sometimes show some grace, but we would hardly expect them to show the eagerness that God showed, to the point of allowing his Son to become a sacrifice on our behalf.

Questions For Discussion or Study: What is so remarkable about God's character? Are there other amazing qualities besides the ones that Micah mentions here? How can we

learn to appreciate and understand these more fully? How should it affect our relationship with God to know that his anger is brief and his mercy lasting? How do we avoid taking undue advantage of this?

*A **lasting** hope **Micah*** □□□□□□□□

Because of God's character, we are able to have a hope that will prove completely reliable in spite of our own weaknesses and sins. In these concluding verses, we see some of the many ways in which an understanding of God's character can help us in our relationship with him. We also see how much more secure our lives can be when our hope is in God, and not in ourselves.

Amongst all of the things that we hope for from God, the prophet reminds us that the hope of compassion and mercy is the one that we need most of all (7:19). It is also a constant need, as suggested by Micah's phrase that "you will again have compassion." Our need for grace is not just an occasional necessity in our lives. Our earthly natures are too weak for us to live flawless lives even for very short periods of time. God wants us, instead, to learn to rejoice in his grace.

Micah also uses two images to emphasize how thoroughly God will forgive our sins. He first describes God as trampling our sins underfoot, stomping on them and crushing them, so that they are no more. He then gives the image of our iniquities being hurled into the depths of the sea, where they will sink and drown, never to trouble us again. These are important images because they show the combination of hatred for sin and love for grace that characterize God. He takes these drastic actions against our sins for both reasons. Because he hates sin, he wants to see sin crushed, beaten, drowned, and buried. Because he loves grace, he will do this himself, knowing that we are incapable of doing it for ourselves.

The book closes by reminding us that we also have the hope of an eternal relationship with God (7:20). When Micah speaks of the patriarchs and of the promises that God made to them, he is well aware that we have inherited those very promises, and that they are just as valuable to us as they were to our spiritual forefathers so many centuries ago. God will always be true to Jacob and his promises to him. God will always show mercy to Abraham's spiritual descendants, even when they don't appreciate it as much as they should. Because we have inherited these same promises, we can have a great assurance in God's grace and a lasting hope for the future.

God's pledge and his promises allow us to share in the hope and joy of his people throughout the ages. One more time, Micah recalls the days of long ago, when God's people lived securely and without complications, in a close relationship with him. We too can have this kind of peace and contentment. Not that the world itself will change and go back to a simpler time, but that we can have that same peace and security in spite of the troubled world around us. We can hope in God to transform our character in this world, and to give us a lasting home with him in the next.

Questions for Discussion or Study: Why is it so important to have the hope that God will show us mercy? What do Micah's images in verse 19 signify? Why is it hard for us to accept how completely God forgives our sin? What promises did we inherit from Abraham and Jacob? How are they still of value? In what sense can we live as "in days long ago"? How does this give us hope in God?

-Mark Garner, Northland Church of Christ, Columbus, Ohio, May 2005

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