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# Micah 1:1-16

## God of Justice: Why Micah?

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Did you know? “When the **Library of Congress** in **Washington DC** was rebuilt in the late nineteenth century, prominent religious leaders, after considering notable quotes from all known religious literature, chose **Micah 6:8** as the **motto** for the alcove of religion.<sup>1</sup> The **inscription** reads, “What doth the Lord require of thee but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God.”

Chances are that most of us have heard verses from Micah, such as this **promise of peace**:

### **Micah 4:3**

He will judge between many peoples  
and will settle disputes for strong nations far and wide.  
They will beat their swords into plowshares  
and their spears into pruning hooks.  
Nation will not take up sword against nation,  
nor will they train for war anymore. (NIV®)

Or maybe around **Christmas time** you’ve heard read aloud this prophecy about the **birth of Christ**:

### **Micah 5:2**

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

But although we may have heard verses from this book, chances are we don’t really know **what it’s about** or **why it matters** for us today. I hope by the **end** of this sermon series we will understand why Micah is worth a whole sermon series. And since some if not all of us are asking “Why Micah?” I thought I would make today’s sermon all about why I’ve chosen this book. So...

## **Why Micah? So that we might know the real God better. (Micah 1:1-2)**

Now it’s easy to say, “All Scripture matters! That’s why we’re studying it!” Which would be true. But why do we read and study the Bible? So that we can know the real God better by what he has told us in his Word.

**1** The word of the Lord that came to Micah of Moresheth during the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah—the vision he saw concerning Samaria and Jerusalem. (NIV®)

The name “Micah” is actually a rhetorical question in Hebrew, “Who is like Yahweh?”<sup>2</sup> or “Who is like God?”<sup>3</sup> I’ve broken **Micah** (מִיכָה) down the best I could here:

Miy (מי) - Who is  
ca (כּ) - like  
h (ה) - Yahweh (abbreviated form of יהוה)

All Scriptures are quoted from the New International Version (NIV®) unless otherwise noted.

The point Micah's name makes is that no-one is like Yahweh! No one is like our God. That means you **can't accidentally believe** in this God. You need to be **introduced** to the true and living God. You need to know his character and compassion. By the end of the book **Micah himself** declares that he knows the real God.

### **Micah 7:18**

Who is a God like you,  
who pardons sin and forgives the transgression  
of the remnant of his inheritance?  
You do not stay angry forever  
but delight to show mercy. (NIV®)

Micah is a man who knew and experienced God. We really don't know much about Micah. He's from the town of **Moreseth**, which was located in a **farming region** about "22 miles southwest of Jerusalem."<sup>4</sup> He prophesied during the reigns of the Judean kings **Jotham**, **Ahaz**, and **Hezekiah** somewhere between **750** and **686 BC**.<sup>5</sup> **Hosea** and **Isaiah** were two other prophets from around this same time.<sup>6</sup> But we do know that Micah delivered a **hard message** about **God's holiness** and **justice** to the people of Israel and Judah.

**2** Hear, you peoples, all of you,  
listen, earth and all who live in it,  
that the Sovereign Lord may bear witness against you,  
the Lord from his holy temple. (NIV®)

Micah is acting as a type of **covenant lawyer**. Back in Exodus God made a **promise** (a covenant) with the people of Israel that if they would **obey** him he would **bless** them but if they **disobeyed** him they would experience **curses**. They **disobeyed** God by worshipping **idols** and forming **political alliances** with foreign nations and now he has taken them to **court** and is acting as a "**witness**" against them.

It's tempting to imagine that God is like a **kind** and **gentle grandpa** who doesn't really care what his **children** and **grandchildren** do as long as they listen to him **tell stories**. Maybe you've heard that "God is love." Well that's true, but love is not God. God is love and he is **holy** and **just** and cares so much about his people he is willing to **hurt** and **wound** those he loves to **deliver them** from their sins.

I read one **commentary** this week that gave the example of someone **addicted to drugs**.<sup>7</sup> This is a **serious thing** but I want you to **imagine** that someone you **care deeply about** (a parent, a brother or sister, a child, a close friend) has become addicted to drugs and the drugs are **rapidly tearing their life apart**. You know that if they don't stop they will **alienate** everyone they love and will soon **overdose** and **die**. If you knew this would you go to them and say, "Hey, I thought that **maybe** if you think it's a good idea you could **perhaps** stop taking drugs and get **clean**, but it's your choice. I **support you** no matter your decision." They would say, "I'm not going to do that. I'm fine. The drugs are really not that dangerous and I'm safe when I take them." Instead, you would do **everything** in your **power** to convince them to stop. Wouldn't you get angry and mad and cut them off from your **funds** so they can't buy drugs? You'd get angry because you care deeply. That **anger**, that **judgment**, that **holiness**, is truly **loving**. Judgment can be loving.

Do you want to know the **real** God who cares about **reality** and **truth** and **justice**? If you want to know more about him, Micah is for you. *Why Micah? So that we might know the real God better.*

## **Why Micah? So that we might recognize and repent of our idols and injustices. (Micah 1:3-16)**

I'm not going to read all the verses but I will **summarize** a few. In **verses 3-5** The Lord God comes down in judgment against the **capital** of Israel, **Samaria**, and the capital of **Judah**, **Jerusalem**. The nation we call

Israel went through a **civil war** around **930 BC** and they **split** into **two kingdoms**, Northern Israel and Southern Judah. Both sinned against God and in **verses 6-7** Micah specifically calls out Israel's **idolatry**.

“Idolatry is choosing one’s own will above God’s will. It is giving ultimate allegiance—which deserves to be given to God alone—to another object of worship, another object of affection.”<sup>8</sup> - *Micah For You* by Stephen Um

So **what kind** of idolatry did Israel commit? When Israel split the king of the north, **Jeroboam**, **worried** that the people in his region would **travel south** to the **temple** in **Jerusalem** to worship the **one true God** and that would cause him to **lose power**. So what does he do? In **1 Kings 12:25-33** He makes **two golden calves** for his people to worship, which leads the Israelite people into **idol worship** and **forsaking** the one true God. Micah declares in **verses 8-9** that Northern Israel's **unfaithfulness** has **spread** to **Southern Judah**. That northern Samaria has **infected** southern Jerusalem with its disobedience and idolatry.

As Micah goes through the rest of the chapter he **calls out** not just the idolatry of Samaria and Jerusalem but **other towns** across Judea. He does it using **wordplay** that is hard to pick up in English.<sup>9</sup> Each town (Gath, Beth Ophrah, Shaphir) is accompanied by a judgment that matches its name by sharing a **similar sound**. So instead of reading this in the NIV I'm going to read *The Two Horizon Commentary's* translation:

**10** In Tell Town don't tell it (Gath)  
in Dust House roll in the dust (Beth Ophrah)

**11** Get yourselves out of there in nakedness and shame, residents of Beauty Town (Shaphir)  
no exit for Exit Town (Zaanan)  
the mourning of Neighbor Town means no more neighbor (Beth Ezel)

**12** For the residents of Bitterville hoped for better (Maroth)  
for war has come down from Yahweh to the gate of the City of Peace (Jerusalem)

**13** Bind the chariot to the harness, residents of Harness Town (Lachish)

**14** therefore you will give parting gifts to Inheritance of Gath (Moresbeth Gath)  
the house of deception will prove deceptive to the kings of Israel (Akzib)

**15** I will bring a conqueror to Conquering Town (Mareshah)  
unto the land of the caves will flee the glory of Israel (Adullam)<sup>10</sup>

When I think of the town I grew up in, **Estes Park**, it's right next to **Rocky Mountain National Park**. It has great access to the mountains and is a beautiful **park-like town** that attracts lots of **tourists**. But what if the **town voted to rename** Estes Park to **Estes Dump**? Do you think anyone want to go there? No! Micah has flipped the meaning of these towns according to their coming judgment! Another author writes:

“Micah uses deliberate puns to describe the ironic nature of the eventual destruction: the very thing that each place worships will be the source of its destruction and the place where its judgment is most clearly seen.”<sup>11</sup>- *Micah For You* by Stephen Um

So what are some of the idols we see in our **world** and **culture**? I'd like you to take the **slip of paper** that came in your **bulletin**, and if you haven't already done so **write** your answer to the question. “**What's an idol our culture worships?**” Would you take a moment and do that?

After you've written the answer to the first question, would you look at the **second question**. “**What's an injustice our culture commits?**” This question has less to do with today's sermon and more to do with our **series** as a whole. Next week we're going to get into some specific injustices the people of Israel and Judah

commit. And as we apply this to today we need to think about what injustices **we see around us**. But before I identify what **I think** are injustices, I'd like to know **what you think** are injustices. I don't think it's just the **role of the pastor** to be prophetic in a **church**, but the role of the **church** to be prophetic in the **culture**. Write **whatever** you think is an example of injustice. I may share some of the results during our series. After our sermon I'll **collect** your answers so you have a little **extra time** to write them down.

There is a **connection** between **our idols** and **our injustices**. It's those things we **worship**, those things that define us, that lead us to **mistreat others**. So I've been thinking about what some of our **community's idols** are. What might **Westford worship**? I got lunch with Bernie on Wednesday at a **Chinese restaurant** and my **fortune cookie** read, "You are going to have a **very comfortable old age**." I thought, "I think that's kind of like **Westford's idol**." It's fair to say our community desires a **comfortable, happy**, life for **themselves** and for their **kids**. The people of our town want to get ahead **academically** and **financially**. Now **success** and **comfort** and a great **education** can be good things, but when they become **ultimate things** they become idols. And idolatry leads to injustice.

Back when we were **planting Cornerstone** we asked our **team members** to **interview local organizations** about **community needs**. One of the most interesting interviews was with the Westford housing authority. Our team wrote up summaries of each interview and I'm going to read you a small section from that writeup.

*One thing she (the director of the housing authority) mentioned, almost as an afterthought, but obviously something that is dear to her heart was the lack of town support for affordable housing and that perhaps the churches could help. She said that the people in town, especially during town meetings, do not want affordable housing in their neighborhoods. They have biases against it and will speak out sharply against it in town meetings. She would love to have a member of the clergy, or perhaps a group of clergy members from town that would stand up in meetings in support of the needs of this population. Perhaps if this happened, people might be more hesitant to be so harshly critical of it and be swayed to support it more.*

I feel like this was a **missed opportunity** because we got busy and haven't done anything about this. I **emailed** the housing authority this week to see if the director is still working there and just to try and start the **conversation** again. Why get involved? Because there's **injustice** and we worship a **God of justice**.

**Idolatry leads to injustice.** When we worship anything besides God, be it success or safety or comfort or family or wealth or education, it leads to mistreatment of those in need, like the poor who need a home. *Why Micah? So that we might recognize and repent of our idols and injustices.* The last verse calls us to **repent**.

**16** Shave your head in mourning  
for the children in whom you delight;  
make yourself as bald as the vulture,  
for they will go from you into exile. (NIV®)

**Humble yourselves. Believe and repent.** Now as I opened our sermon series I **didn't ask** you to identify your idols or injustices. But as we go through this series I hope **we** will be **brave enough** to identify idols in our **nation**, in our **culture**, in our **community**, in our **church**, and in **ourselves**. If Micah was speaking primarily to the **people of God** back then, **Israel**, then the people his message first applies to **today** is also the people of God, the **church, us**. As we recognize our idols and injustices let's repent and be renewed.

## **Why Micah? So that we might experience renewed hope. (Micah 1-7)**

We're going to close by watching the Bible Project's video of Micah. I want us to watch it to get the **big picture** of the book of Micah. As we go along in Micah you're going to notice that the prophet first identifies

sin and injustice (Micah 1:2-7), then reveals God's judgment against that sin (Micah 1:8-2:11), and finally offers **hope** and **restoration** (Micah 2:12-13). The **pattern** is sin, judgment, hope.<sup>12</sup>

As the book goes along that message of hope and restoration **grows** and **grows**, **ultimately pointing** to **Christ Jesus** himself. **Jesus** is the one who **bore** the **consequences** for **our idols**, our **curse**, our **nakedness**, our **tears**, our **dust**, our **shame**, our **mourning**, our **disaster**, our **pain**, so that we no longer have to live in **exile** but can have **eternal life**.<sup>13</sup> If you repent and trust in him, he will **forgive** you of your sins, take God's **judgment** upon himself, and give you **eternal hope**.

***We're studying Micah so that we might know God better, recognize and repent of our idols and injustices, and experience renewed hope.***

*Pastor Jonathan Romig preached this message at Cornerstone Congregational Church. You can download a PDF copy of this sermon above, which includes further endnotes and references. Click to listen to sermons or to read our story.*

<sup>1</sup> Zondervan NIV Study Bible, Micah Introduction, Kindle Location 211284.

<sup>2</sup> Dempster, Stephen G.. *Micah* (The Two Horizons Old Testament Commentary (THOTC)) (p. 1). Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.. Kindle Edition.

<sup>3</sup> Um, Stephen. *Micah For You: Acting Justly, Loving Mercy* (God's Word For You) (Kindle Location 292). The Good Book Company. Kindle Edition.

<sup>4</sup> ESV Study Bible. Crossway. Micah Intro: Author and Title. Kindle Location 243573.

<sup>5</sup> Zondervan NIV Study Bible, Micah Introduction: Date and Addressees. Kindle Location 211263.

<sup>6</sup> ESV Study Bible. Crossway. Micah Intro: Date. Kindle Location 243574.

<sup>7</sup> Um, Stephen. (Kindle Locations 174-188).

<sup>8</sup> Um, Stephen. (Kindle Locations 146-148).

<sup>9</sup> “Micah 1 sermon by Dr. Bob Utley. Youtube. Free Bible Commentary. Published April 27, 2014. Accessed Jan 10, 2019. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v6rSDxQENwE&t=2s> Dr. Bob Utley’s sermon on Micah 1 helped make this wordplay clear to me.

<sup>10</sup> Dempster, Stephen G.. (pp. 66-67). “For example, when Abram and Sarai received new names they also received new destinies (Gen 17). To discover the meaning of the name of an object or person is to discover destiny and identity. In this case, Micah chooses names with sounds or meanings that are virtual omens of disaster...”

<sup>11</sup> Um, Stephen. (Kindle Locations 241-243).

<sup>12</sup> Up, Stephen. (Kindle Locations 50-72).

<sup>13</sup> Read Jeremiah 26:17-19 for the story of the people’s repentance in response to Micah’s prophesies.