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Commentary

## **The Message of Micah for Today**

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The message of Micah for today is that as we wait for God's kingdom to come, we should honestly assess our sins, repent of them, immerse ourselves in the beauty of God's character and covenant, walk humbly before Him in justice and kindness, and proclaim His grace to a world under judgement.

### **Behold the Goodness and Severity of God (1; 7:8-20)**

The book of Micah opens with God's thunderous indictment of His people's sin

and His determination to bring judgement upon them (1:2-5). Samaria would be destroyed. The inhabitants of Jerusalem would be sent into exile. This devastation would be both up close and personal, tearing through homes and small towns, and public and spectacular, reaching “unto the gate of my people, even to Jerusalem”—a picture of the total devastation sin brings upon us when we persist in it (Micah 1:9-16).

But this opening section on sin and judgment parallels the closing section on grace and forgiveness (7:8-20). 1 The sinfulness of sin and the devastation it brings (chap. 1) give way to God’s grace and the hope He offers (7:8-20). Micah prays, “Feed thy people with thy rod, the flock of thine heritage,” and God answers by promising to show His people “marvellous things” (7:14-15). God would forgive them because of His character—

“Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity...? He retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy” (vv. 18-19)—and because of His covenant—“Thou wilt perform the truth to Jacob, and the mercy to Abraham, which thou hast sworn unto our fathers from the days of old” (7:20).

God’s judgment and forgiveness—His severity and goodness—remind us of what Paul concluded in his letter to the Gentiles about God’s dealings with Israel: “Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell, severity; but toward thee, goodness, if thou continue in his goodness: otherwise thou also shalt be cut off” (Rom. 11:22). Let us, therefore, repent of our own sins, walk in renewed obedience to Christ, and, in hope, rely on the deliverance He brings. The goodness and severity of our God have not changed.

## **Don't Be Like Everyone Else: Follow the LORD (2:1-13; 3; 6; 7:1-7)**

Society in Micah's day was corrupt. Oppression was rampant. Fellow Israelites devoted much time and thought to devising ways to "oppress a man and his house," to "covet fields, and take them by violence" (2:2). Therefore, Micah preached that God would "devise" the removal of the whole land (vv. 3-5). But the people's response was "prophecy ye not"—Micah's message received no "likes." The problem, however, was not with God's word but with the hearers' wicked hearts. After all, God reminds us, "Do not my words do good to him that walketh uprightly?" (v. 7).

Seeing that the prince and judge ask for a bribe, that the great man utters his "mischievous desire," and that even the son and daughter treat their own parents

with contempt, Micah concluded, “there is none upright among them... the good man is perished out of the earth” and “the best of them is like a brier” (2:6; 7:2-6). Like Micah, John Owen observed the apostasy that was rife in his day, with people “corrupted in their principles and profane in their lives”—and so he warned his readers: don’t presume that God will prevent this apostasy from growing until “it swallow up all visible profession.”

Letting profaneness and corruption slowly creep into us—or, more accurately, creep out of us (Mark 7:21)—as we cut corners in our spiritual disciplines, business, family, and duties may leave us in a much worse condition than we ever imagined. For “he that endeavours not to be better, will by little and little grow worse and worse.” Let us not follow what everyone calls “normal” and what God calls “evil.” Let’s follow what Micah

resolved when everyone else wanted him to be corrupt like them: "But as for me, I will look to the LORD; I will wait for the God of my salvation; my God will hear me" (7:7).

Micah then addresses the sins of the leaders (chaps. 3 and 6): the prophets were prophesying for pay, priests were teaching for a price, and rulers were giving judgment for a bribe (3:11)—even though God's requirements had been made clear to them: "to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God" (6:8). The prophets did not give people God's word. They prophesied "peace" as long as their mouths and bellies were full (3:5), but to God this was spiritual cannibalism: "they eat the flesh of my people" (3:3)—a chilling, unexpected onset of the curses for covenant-breaking, namely "thou shalt eat...the flesh of thy sons and of thy

daughters” (cf. Deut. 28:53-63). In response, God would empty their mouths of food—“you shall eat, but not be satisfied”—and empty their mouths of prophecies—“they shall all cover their lips; for there is no answer of God” (3:6-7; 6:13-16). Considering the failure of the prophets depicted here, let’s take to heart à Brakel’s exhortation to Christians who bear a kind of prophetic responsibility:

*If you love Christ, you will be desirous to speak of Him, and you will be desirous that He be known, praised, and glorified by everyone.... If someone is unfaithful, lazy, void of desire, and neglectful of the work of a prophet, such a person will generally walk in darkness and be lacking spirituality; his light will become dimmer and dimmer and he will become less capable of performing his task.*

When those entrusted with God's Word fail to give it to people, God may withdraw His light.

### **Submit to the Ruler from of Old (Micah 4-5)**

Chapters 4 and 5 address the desire for restoration in chapters 1 and 7 and the longing for righteous leadership in chapters 3 and 6. After a spectacular reversal of Israel's suffering (4:11-5:1), God would extend His rule over the nations (4:1-5; 5:10-15), grant His grace to the remnant (4:6-7; 5:5b-9), and provide a ruler from David's line to "stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the LORD" (4:8-10; 5:2-5a).

In contrast to Israel's corrupt leaders (3:1-4), a ruler would come forth "for me," for the LORD—not for His own advantage (5:2). He would guide the nations in God's law and bring peace to His people (4:1-5;

5:5). This ruler's "goings forth," His origins and activities, "have been from of old"; this is "a description of Christ's eternal generation." This ruler, Jesus Christ, brings the longed-for forgiveness of sins (7:8-20; cf. Matt. 2:6)—He answers the prayer in 7:14 to "Feed thy people with thy rod"—but He "will be Saviour to none but those to whom he is a Master."

Are you a stranger to grace? Has sin wrought havoc in your life? There is a ruler whose name is "Peace," who will never cast out those who come to Him. But come quickly, for He "will execute vengeance in anger and fury upon the heathen" (5:15). Are you in, or on your way to, a state of backsliding? Cutting corners in your duties or dabbling in impurity today may, by slow degrees, leave you irrecoverable tomorrow.

Return to God, and let His character and covenant be your delight. Do you feel pressure to join everyone else in sinful, hastily devised thought, speech, and action? Be resolved, like Micah, to follow God in patience and prayer: "But as for me, I will look to the LORD; I will wait for the God of my salvation; my God will hear me" (7:7). Bend the knee to Christ, submit to His rule, and put your hope in His kingdom to come.

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