

## MICAH: Who is like God?

by Ray C. Stedman

Micah was a contemporary of the great prophet, Isaiah, and his book is of a similar style. Sometimes, in fact, this book is called “Isaiah in miniature” because it is a much briefer presentation of essentially the same message as the prophecy of Isaiah.

The theme of this little prophecy is found in the meaning of the prophet’s name. I hope you have a Bible that helps you with the meaning of Hebrew names for these names are often very significant. For example, in the book of Genesis the name of the man who gained fame as the world’s oldest man was itself a prophecy. In fact, when Methuselah was born, his father, Enoch, learned something that he never forgot – and it was hidden in the name of Methuselah. Methuselah lived 969 years, and his name means “When he dies, it will come.” The year he died the flood came, so that shows something of the significance of the Hebrew names.

The name *Micah* means “Who is like God?” or “Who is like Jehovah?” Therefore, this is his repeated question. Everywhere this man went, apparently, this is what he said: “Who is like Jehovah?” “Who is like God?” – until people began to call him this. There is some suggestion that this may even have been a nickname that was given to this man. You can imagine people looking around as Micah comes up the street and saying to themselves, “Here comes old Who-is-like-God.” Since this is what Micah is talking about in this book, the theme of this book is God-likeness and the great message of God to the world today is how to be like God. This is also the theme of Paul’s Epistle to the Ephesians, and I think it is very instructive to put these two messages together so that we can see that the New Testament and the Old Testament teach the same truths in different ways. That is what makes the Old Testament so enlightening to us, and

if you do not understand the New Testament, read the Old Testament.

Do you remember the story about the Greek philosopher, Diogenes? He went around with a lantern looking for an honest man all through the day. Even in broad daylight he carried his lantern around to arouse curiosity. When anybody asked Diogenes, “What are you doing with a lantern in broad daylight?” he would reply, “I am looking for an honest man.” This is like Micah’s search (Chapter 1, Verse 1):

**The word of the Lord that came to Micah of Moresheth in the days of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, which he saw concerning Samaria and Jerusalem. {Micah 1:1 RSV}**

The book is divided into three parts. The first three chapters describe the failure of the nation. We get this theme in many of the prophets, but here in this book we have the picture of the lack of godliness. And then comes a wonderful section in chapters four and five that is a vision of the future one, the one who is Godlike. This is a predictive section that looks forward to the coming of Christ, the Messiah. The last three chapters give us the pleading of God to the nation.

In the first chapter there is a magnificent picture of God striding forth in judgment against this nation of Judah, because of their utter failure to be godly even though God provided them with everything it takes to be godly.

That sounds familiar, does it not? Why are we not godly? We have all it takes, in the Holy Spirit, to be godly. Therefore, this book comes right home to us because we are in the same boat.

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In the first section you have a beautiful, poetic picture of God moving out (Chapter 1, Verses 3-5):

**For behold, the Lord is coming forth out of  
his place,  
and will come down and tread upon the  
high places of the earth.  
And the mountains will melt under him  
and the valleys will be cleft,  
like wax before the fire,  
like waters poured down a steep place.  
All this is for the transgression of Jacob  
and for the sins of the house of Israel.  
{Micah 1:3-5a RSV}**

Then God picks out the capitals of these two lands. What is the transgression of Jacob? Samaria. That is, the capital, the heart of the nation. And what is the sin of the house of Judah? Is it not Jerusalem? He says (Verse 6):

**Therefore I will make Samaria a heap in  
the open country [a rubbish dump],  
a place for planting vineyards;  
and I will pour down her stones into the  
valley, {Micah 1:6a RSV}**

All this is a picture of the destruction by the armies of Assyria which, within a hundred years, would sweep across the countryside and demolish everything. The prophet says that this is God's judgment.

In Verses 10 through 16 there is something very interesting, although it is hard to see in the English version. These prophets were punsters, and although some people say that a pun is the lowest form of humor, the Bible has many puns in it, but they are hard for us to see if we do not understand Hebrew. If you could read the original Hebrew, you would see that there is pun upon pun here in the names of these cities mentioned by Micah. Verse 10:

**Tell it not in Gath, weep not at all; {Micah  
1:10 RSV}**

*Gath* means "weep" and the prophet plays on that name. And in this manner, all the way through, he picks up names of cities and then ties the judgment of God in with them. Here is how it would read:

In Weep Town, weep not; in Dust Town, roll yourself in the dust. [*Bathleaphrah* means "town of dust."] In Beauty Town, beauty will be shamed. [That is the meaning of *Shaphir* – "beauty."] In Zaanan [which means "march"] they'll march not forth. In Neighbor Town they will end up with a useless neighbor. In Bitter Town they will grieve bitterly. {cf, Micah 1:10-12}

Then in Verse 13 you have Lachish, which means horse – Horse Town, the one-horse town. Micah says, "Oh, inhabitants of Horse Town." One play on words after another.

Chapter 2 goes on to picture vividly the utter destruction of the people, including the rulers, the prophets, the women and the children.

Then in Chapter 3 you read the reason for this total judgment of God. Micah has been seeking godliness and he looks where he might expect to find it – among the rulers of the nation, among the representatives of God. But he finds corruption, oppression, bribery, and injustice everywhere. Micah exposes the mess in Jerusalem, and he says that the reason God is visiting judgment upon his people is that those who have been given the authority to act in God's stead have forgotten that they are responsible to God.

This always touches us, does it not? For whenever we are put in a position of authority we are told to remember that we also have an authority over us. It does not make any difference whether you are an authority in the church, as an elder, or in the city, as mayor or councilman, or if you have just been elected the president of your class, or the head of your group. The New Testament reminds us that masters are to remember they have a master in heaven as well, and God holds all authority responsible to him (Eph 6:9). The man who forgets this, therefore, turns to use his power for his own advantage. And that is what had corrupted the nation. The prophet sums it up for us in Chapter 3, Verse 11:

**Its heads [its rulers] give judgment for a  
bribe,  
its priests teach for hire,  
its prophets divine for money;  
{Micah 3:11a RSV}**

There are all three classes of rulers for the nation – the spiritual rulers, the civil rulers and the

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moral rulers. Although these are the ones who should have been godly, they are the most ungodly because they failed to recognize that whenever a man is in an office of any kind, he is there to represent God. That is true even for young people in school offices. You represent God in that office. Paul declared, "Those [powers] that exist have been instituted by God," (Rom 13:1 RSV). And that does not just stop with civil government, but it applies to any level. Paul calls them the ministers of God for good, and when rulers – civil, spiritual, or moral – recognize that they are representatives of God, there is always good government. But when they forget, then there is corruption, oppression, bribery, agony and tears.

In Chapter 4, in a passage of wonderfully exalted vision, the prophet lifts up his eyes and looks across the centuries past the coming of Babylon, past the rise of the great eastern empire of Greece, past the Roman Empire and the days of the Caesars, past the Middle Ages with Martin Luther and the Reformation and John Wesley, and even past our own day, to the coming of one who is Godlike. This is one of the most beautiful Messianic passages in the Scriptures (Chapter 4, Verses 1-4):

**It shall come to pass in the latter days  
that the mountain of the house of the Lord  
shall be established as the highest of the  
mountains,  
and shall be raised up above the hills;  
and peoples shall flow to it,  
and many nations shall come, and say:  
"Come, let us go up to the mountain of the  
Lord,  
to the house of the God of Jacob;  
that he may teach us his ways  
and we may walk in his paths."  
For out of Zion shall go forth the law,  
and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.  
{Micah 4:1-2 RSV}**

The passage then narrows to a person.

**He shall judge between many peoples,  
and shall decide for strong nations afar  
off;  
and they shall beat their swords into plow-  
shares,  
and their spears into pruning hooks;  
nation shall not lift up sword against nation,  
neither shall they learn war any more;**

**but they shall sit every man under his vine  
and under his fig tree,  
and none shall make them afraid;  
for the mouth of the Lord of hosts has  
spoken. {Micah 4:3-4 RSV}**

That is yet to come. The nations will never forget how to make war, never obey this word to beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks until the one who knows how to rule in godliness comes.

The rest of Chapter 4 goes on to describe how Israel will be gathered and will ultimately defeat her enemies.

Chapter 5 opens with a new thought. The prophet says to Israel (Verse 1):

**Now you are walled about with a wall;  
[That was a picture of the Assyrian  
army being gathered around the city]  
siege is laid against us; {Micah 5:1a RSV}**

It is also a picture of that day when a greater Assyrian army out of the north shall come against Israel. The reason it comes is given here in this verse:

**with a rod they strike upon the cheek  
the ruler of Israel. {Micah 5:1b RSV}**

Now that is a rather quick reference to the first coming of the Lord Jesus when he stood before Pilate and the rulers of the nation and they struck him with a reed, and put a crown of thorns on his head, and a robe of purple on him, and bowed before him and mocked him, (Matt 27:27-30). They struck on the cheek the ruler of Israel.

Now the prophet suddenly sees where this ruler is to come from. This is one of the great predictive passages of the Old Testament (Verse 2):

**But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah,  
who are little to be among the clans of  
Judah,  
from you shall come forth for me  
one who is to be ruler in Israel,  
whose origin is from of old,  
from ancient days. {Micah 5:2 RSV}**

Or literally, from eternity, from everlasting.

Remember when the wise men came out of the East looking for the one born king of the Jews? They said to the rulers of Jerusalem, "Where is he

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that is born king of the Jews?" And the chief priests said, "You will find him in Bethlehem," (cf, Matt 2:1-6). How did they know? Well, because 700 years before, Micah had said to them, "Thou Bethlehem Ephrathah (that is, Bethlehem in the land of Ephraim), though you are little among the cities of Judah, yet there shall come forth from you one who is to be the ruler in Israel, whose goings-forth (or origins) are from of old, from everlasting."

And then, in Verse 3, there is a parenthesis:

**Therefore he shall give them up [the nation of Israel] until the time. {Micah 5:3a RSV}**

And that is why Israel has been wandering in defeat without a king, without a temple, and without a sacrifice for centuries. One of the wonders of the world is that this nation of Israel maintains its identity despite its dispersion among the nations. "He shall give them up until the time."

**when she who is in travail has brought forth;  
then the rest of his brethren shall return to the people of Israel. {Micah 5:3b RSV}**

And then looking again at the one he saw coming out of Bethlehem Ephrathah (Verse 4):

**And he shall stand and feed his flock in the strength of the Lord,  
in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God.  
And they shall dwell secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth. {Micah 5:4 RSV}**

Seven hundred years down the corridors of time Micah clearly perceived the one who would rise out of obscurity and fulfill these predictions. His goings-forth are from everlasting; he is the God-man, the only godly man that ever walked on earth, the Godlike one.

Now in Chapters 6 and 7, in a passage of power and beauty, Jehovah turns to plead with his people and to show them the way of God-likeness. We hear a lot about dialogue today that we need to talk with those to whom we are opposed. Well God had a controversy with his people and he talked it

over with them in this passage. The prophet says (Chapter 6, Verses 1-2):

**Hear what the Lord says:  
Arise, plead your case before the mountains,  
and let the hills hear your voice.  
Hear, you mountains, the controversy of the Lord,  
and you enduring foundations of the earth;  
for the Lord has a controversy with his people,  
and he will contend with Israel. {Micah 6:1-2 RSV}**

That sets the stage. Now God speaks, and this is what he says (Verses 3-5):

**"O my people, what have I done to you?  
In what have I wearied you? Answer me!" {Micah 6:3 RSV}**

"What have I done to you? Why do you reject me so? Why do you turn me aside? In what have I wearied you now? Tell me."

**"For I brought you up from the land of Egypt,  
and redeemed you from the house of bondage;  
and I sent before you Moses, Aaron, and Miriam.  
O my people, remember what Balak king of Moab devised,  
and what Balaam the son of Beor answered him,  
and what happened from Shittim to Gilgal,  
that you may know the saving acts of the Lord." {Micah 6:4-5 RSV}**

What do you think the people are going to say to that? Well here is their answer (Verses 6-7):

**"With what shall I come before the Lord,  
and bow myself before God on high?  
Shall I come before him with burnt offerings,  
with calves a year old?  
Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams,  
with ten thousands of rivers of oil?" {Micah 6:6-7a RSV}**

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“What do you want God? What can I bring you?  
Do you want sacrifice? Is that what you want?”

**“Shall I give my first-born for my transgression,  
the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?” {Micah 6:7b RSV}**

What do you want of me God? (Isn't that what people say so many times?) What are you asking of me anyway?

Now listen to God's gracious answer, one of the most beautiful verses in all the Bible (Verse 8):

**He has showed you, O man, what is good;  
and what does the Lord require of you  
but to do justice, and to love kindness,  
and to walk humbly with your God?  
{Micah 6:8 RSV}**

That is the answer, isn't it? That is the way to God-likeness: to walk humbly with your God. After all he is the only one who can make us God-like. But the Israelites failed to do this, so again there comes the cry of judgment as God at last must wake them up to their folly and their weakness.

The description of judgment is resumed and continues until you come to the last of Chapter 7 where the prophet concludes the message with a most marvelous picture of God. Notice how it starts (Verses 18-20):

**Who is a God like thee, pardoning iniquity  
and passing over transgression  
for the remnant of his inheritance?  
He does not retain his anger for ever  
because he delights in steadfast love.  
He will again have compassion upon us,  
he will tread our iniquities under foot.  
Thou wilt cast all our sins  
into the depths of the sea.**

[As someone once put it “And then put up a sign that says ‘*no fishing.*’”]

**Thou wilt show faithfulness to Jacob  
and steadfast love to Abraham,  
as thou hast sworn to our fathers  
from the days of old.  
{Micah 7:18-20 RSV}**

What is the way to God-likeness? Putting away our wickedness confessing our guilt before God, looking to him to pardon our iniquities and cast all our sins into the depth of the sea. Isn't that just what the New Testament says? “If we confess our sins he is faithful and just and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness,” (1 Jn 1:9 RSV).

Now how do you walk humbly with God? John answers that we should walk in the light as he is in the light, that is, to walk openly and in honesty. Do not try to hide anything from God. Do not pretend to be something you are not to him. “Walk in the light as he is in the light and the blood of Jesus Christ his son cleanses us from all sin,” (1 Jn 1:7 RSV)

Now Micah's question rings in our ears: Who is like God?

Well, the only one who is like God is the man who walks with the Lord Jesus Christ – who is God himself, the Godlike one.

### **Prayer:**

Thank you, Father, for this look into your heart of love, even though, in faithfulness, you must judge your people to make them aware of their foolish ways. Yet your heart is ever pleading and beneath all the thunders of judgment, the darkness of destruction, is that heartbeat of love and concern, of readiness to forgive and restore, and to bring us back into fellowship with you. Help us then to remember this question “Who is like God?” We pray in Christ's name. Amen.

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