

# *What Does the Lord Require of Us?*

## **WEEKLY BIBLE STUDY**

1st in a four-week series

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*Micah 6:1–4, 6–8 (NRSV)*

Hear what the LORD says:  
Rise, plead your case before the mountains,  
and let the hills hear your voice.

<sup>2</sup> 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.

<sup>3</sup> “O my people, what have I done to you?

In what have I wearied you? Answer me!

<sup>4</sup> For I brought you up from the land of Egypt,  
and redeemed you from the house of slavery;  
and I sent before you Moses,  
Aaron, and Miriam.

<sup>6</sup> “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?

<sup>7</sup> Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams,  
with ten thousands of rivers of oil?  
Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression,  
the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?”

<sup>8</sup> He has told you, O mortal, 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?

*Matthew 22:34–40 (NRSV)*

<sup>34</sup> When the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together, <sup>35</sup> and one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. <sup>36</sup> “Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?” <sup>37</sup> He said to him, “ ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’

<sup>38</sup> This is the greatest and first commandment. <sup>39</sup> And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ <sup>40</sup> On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”

*What can you do for someone who has given you everything?*

What does our Lord expect of us? Want from us? Require of us? I’m sure that we could come up with a wide variety of answers to these questions. But in this series, we will take a look at the answers provided by two men: Micah, a prophet who lived seven centuries before Jesus . . . and Jesus himself.

The book of Micah, one of the twelve “minor”<sup>1</sup> prophets, presents challenges to the reader, as do all the books of the prophets. Allison Jean, our Associate Pastor to Young Adults, has written a five-part study of Micah. Her introductory material is excellent and I’ve included it here, in the accompanying textbox.

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<sup>1</sup> “Minor” refers only to the length of the twelve books, not to their importance. In the Hebrew Bible, the writings of the twelve minor prophets are collected on a single scroll. In our Bibles, these are the final twelve books of the Old Testament.

### *Responding to God's grace*

Micah 6:8 is one of the best-known verses in the Bible. More than a few Christians would name it as their “life verse.” What is not known so well is that the verse is a response to a response.

In Micah 6:3-5, God reminds his people what he has done for them. Won't they remember? Won't they learn?

Then, in verses 6-7, we have the response of God's people to the covenantal love God has shown them. Wiseman et al put it well:

Instead of responding to such a wonderful Lord with loving and obedient hearts, Micah's generation transformed the covenant into a contract. In a series of parallel lines, each beginning with a question, a representative 'worshipper' seeks to establish the price that will win God's favour by raising the bid ever higher. Burnt offerings? One-year-old calves (already more costly)? Thousands of rams? Myriads of torrents of oil? Or, the highest price of all, the cruel sacrifice of a child? He can bid no higher. Outwardly he appears spiritual as he bows before the Most High with gift in hand. But his insulting questions betray a desperately wicked heart. Blinded to God's goodness and character, he reasons within his own depraved frame of reference. He need not change; God must change. He compounds his sin of refusing to repent by suggesting that God, like man, can be bought. His willingness to raise the price does not reflect his generosity but veils a complaint that God demands too much; the reverse side of his bargaining is that he hopes to buy God off as cheaply as possible. What effrontery to such a mighty and gracious God!<sup>2</sup>

And so, in the simplest and most profound of terms, God tells his people just what is the proper response to God's love and grace: “to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God.” So simple. So profound. So right. In the coming weeks, we will look at each of those three phrases so we might better grasp the shape of such a response, such a life . . . a truly good life.

### *Learning to live as God wants us to live*

Everyone wants to have a good life. We want to have close and lasting friendships. We want our kids to grow up loved, well-adjusted, and happy. We want to do the right thing. We want to make wise choices that lead to a good life. The hard part is that often we have trouble figuring out what the good life even looks like, and if we think we know what we want, we have trouble knowing which choices will lead us to the life we seek.

A slender volume on my shelves is entitled, *Smart Choices*. It is an excellent introduction to decision analysis (which is a fancy way of saying deciding among choices). The authors take the reader through a straightforward presentation of how to state the problem, define objectives, create alternatives, evaluate tradeoffs and so on. The authors are business school types who want to help managers make better choices.

But for Christians, any talk of the good life or making better choices or living ethically must *first* begin with God. This isn't to say that sound analysis is unimportant, but that the analysis must start with God. It is God who is good. It is God who made this world. It is God who made us in his image (*the imago Dei*). Thus, it must be God who points us toward the better choices. It is God who establishes what a really smart choice is. It is God who takes away our blindness and enables us truly to see the life that we seek and the life that God desires for us.

The ancient Israelites understood that the creator of the universe had created them in his own image, had sought a relationship with them, and had shown them how to live in right relationship with him and with each other. God's instruction to them was the

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<sup>2</sup> Wiseman, D. J., Alexander, T. D., & Waltke, B. K. (1988). *Obadiah, Jonah and Micah: an introduction and commentary* (Vol. 26, pp. 212–213). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

Law and the heart of the Law was inscribed by God on two tablets (Exodus 20). The first tablet spoke to the people's relationship with God and the second tablet spoke to their relationship with one another.

To reiterate, the first tablet speaks to our relationship with God. We are to have no other gods or take God's name in vain and so on. The second tablet speaks to how we are to live with others. We are not to steal or give false testimony. We are to honor our parents and our marriages. We are to forsake murder and so on.

Christians understand that attempting to live out the "Judeo-Christian" ethic derived from the second table, while ignoring the first -- the so-called "second tablet project"<sup>3</sup> - is doomed to failure. We are made in God's image. As the Westminster Confession puts it, we are "made to know God and enjoy him forever." When we seek to build a good life or to do the right thing, we have to begin with God, God's way, and the very reason why we are here in the first place.

Many people mistakenly believe that Jesus came to abolish the Old Testament. On the contrary, Jesus came to fulfill the law. In his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus taught his disciples what God's Law is really all about. When tested by the lawyer, Jesus said that all the Law can be summed in the commandments to love God (the first tablet!) and to love neighbor (the second tablet!). All of the do's and don'ts one finds in the Old Testament are simply concrete expressions of those two commandments -- for an ancient people.

In the coming weeks, we will hear more from Micah and Jesus. Both point us in the same direction, that we are inherently relational, made to live in loving relationship with God and one another . . . to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with our Maker.

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<sup>3</sup> From a wonderful essay by Jay Budziszewski in *First Things*, June/July 2002.

## An Introduction to the Prophet Micah

by Allison Jean, Associate Pastor to Young Adults

**WHO...**Not much is known about Micah the prophet, except what is shared in the introduction of the book. In 1:1, Micah is introduced as a prophet, like many others in the Old Testament. When you read, “The word of the LORD came to \_\_\_\_\_” this is typically a formula for prophetic writing in the Old Testament. We also learn that Micah is from Moresheth, a small village that would likely have been located in the foothills of Judah.<sup>1</sup> Because of this, Micah has a deep connection with the people of Judah rather than the rulers, and he feels very strong ties to the poor and oppressed of Israel.<sup>2</sup>

**WHAT...**The book of Micah is challenging because it is slightly unpredictable. As Micah speaks to the people of Israel, he shares different aspects of God’s character, some of which are unfamiliar or uncomfortable for Christians to consider. Micah shares not only promises of hope and revitalization to God’s people, but he also shares about God’s anger and frustration. This is a challenging idea to wrestle with as Christians, because we focus on God’s unending grace and love. This is an idea we have to grapple with, though, because it is presented to us in our scriptures quite regularly.

**WHEN...**The book of Micah spans a significant period in the history of Israel. A few key historical events that are covered in the book include:

- Israel’s destruction in 722 BCE
- Sennacherib’s (king of Assyria) invasion of Israel in 701 BCE
- Full timeline for Micah’s ministry: 742-686 BCE

It is important to know the timeline of events that led up to Micah’s ministry. In the first half of the 8<sup>th</sup> century BCE, Israel (the northern kingdom) and Judah (the southern kingdom) prospered, flourishing as the nations grew. Both were part of God’s chosen people, even though they had become two separate nations after King David. After numerous unsuccessful kings, however, Israel was conquered by Assyria. Judah, specifically Jerusalem which was the capital, avoided this same fate by paying tribute to Assyria and allowing Assyrian religious traditions to overtake the traditions of the Israelites.<sup>3</sup>

**WHERE...**Even though you will see Micah speaking to “Israel” repeatedly, he is speaking to the southern kingdom of Judah and to its capital Jerusalem, which have not yet been conquered by Assyria.<sup>4</sup>

**WHY...**Micah shares that he has been called by God to make Israel aware of its mistakes, and to call them back to God’s purpose in 3:8. Micah gives prophetic voice not just to future events, but to what he sees happening around him. He is called to interpret what is happening around him according to God’s covenant with Israel. While this is not necessarily a fun job to perform, Micah also realizes that in the midst of God expressing anger and disappointment, God also offers hope and restoration.

<sup>1</sup> Judith E. Sanderson, “Micah,” in *The New Interpreter’s Study Bible* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2003), 1303.

<sup>2</sup> David J. Simundson, “The Book of Micah,” in *The New Interpreter’s Bible*, ed. Leander E. Keck (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1996), 534.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> Judith E. Sanderson, “Micah,” in *The New Interpreter’s Study Bible*, 1303.

## Questions for Discussion and Reflection

1. Do we really grasp all that God has done for us or are we inclined to take it all for granted, or worse, lay the credit at our own feet? And even if we respond to God with gratefulness, do we really embrace the sort of response taught in Micah or by Jesus: do justice, love God, love others, and so on? What are some ways we get this all wrong?
2. The biblical perspective is that making better choices begins with God. Do you really agree? Aren’t there lots of moral and ethical people who don’t acknowledge God or any divine being whatsoever? Where do their “oughts” come from? Why

would anyone care about “oughts” that are derived only from human preferences? What difference does God really make? If making better choices begins with God, why do so many of God’s people make such terrible choices? What evidence is there of God at work in our own choices?

## Daily Bible Readings

*This week: reading through the book of Micah*

**Monday, Micah 1:** The Lord’s judgment on Judea and Samaria

**Tuesday, Micah 2-3:** Judgment on the wicked one and the leaders

**Wednesday, Micah 4:** A portrait of a transformed and peaceful world

**Thursday, Micah 5:** A portrait of God’s enemies defeated and David’s throne restored

**Friday, Micah 6:1-7:8** God’s case against Israel, the judgment, the lament of the prophet

**Saturday, Micah 7:9-20** The portrait of hope, as Israel is restored

## Scott Engle’s Weekday Bible Classes

Join us whenever you can. Each week’s lesson stands on its own.

This is very “drop-in.” Bring something to eat if you like. Bring a study Bible.

On occasion Scott has to cancel class, so if you are coming for the first time, you can check [www.scottengle.org](http://www.scottengle.org) to make sure the class is meeting.

### **Monday Evening Class**

We are studying the book of Exodus.

Meets from 7:00 to 8:15 in Piro Hall

### **Tuesday Lunchtime Class**

We are studying the story of Esther.

Meets from 11:45 to 1:00 in Piro Hall

## Scott’s 10:50 Sunday Class in Festival Hall

This is a large, lecture-oriented class open to all ages.

**Our current series:** *The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly: The Kings of Israel*