



Catherine
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Micah

StudyNotes
FOR SMALL GROUPS & PERSONAL REFLECTION

INTRODUCTION to the series...

Micah

During the preaching series that accompanies this guide, we will look at the teachings of the Old Testament prophet.

End to Oppression	Micah 2:1-13
Justice	Micah 3:1-12
Hope	Micah 4:1-5
Depend on God	Micah 5:5b-15
What is Required of Me?	Micah 6:1-16
Who is like God?	Micah 7: 8-20

Micah was a preacher-prophet called to be the Prophet in the City during a time of faithlessness and trouble in Israel. Prior puts his dates as between 742 & 686 (remember that the dates count down to Christ's birth).

There are significant themes running throughout Micah's prophecies:

Justice

Worship

Sin & Judgement

Hope

When we deal properly with these things, we find ourself walking in step with God. Micah will remind us that God has no tolerance of persistent wickedness and evil and those who are part of this corruption will find themselves subjected to treatment of a similar and long-lasting nature. Those who come under God's rule and walk in God's ways will enjoy the peace which will come with restoration.

Micah brings the word of God to the people.

I hope he brings it to us as we study and learn together.

Enjoy the series!

Love, Catherine

Session 1: The End to Oppression

As you Gather 5-10 minutes

Discuss the names of local places or your own surnames. Do they have obvious meanings or easily attributable puns?

What can you do with the name of your street, town, city? *For example: My home village is "Fylingthorpe"... Where - ahem - "high flyers come from"*

Pray & Worship 10 minutes

Sing a hymn or a song which invites the presence of God

Pray

1. That you might see the rule of God at work in you.
2. That the justice of God would sweep through our community.
3. That the community where you live might be turned to God.
4. That you would live faithful and Godly lives.
5. For prophets and preachers to proclaim the truth of God's word.

Read the Word 50 minutes

Micah 2:1-13

New Living Translation (NLT)

What sorrow awaits you who lie awake at night, thinking up evil plans.

You rise at dawn and hurry to carry them out, simply because you have the power to do so.

² When you want a piece of land, you find a way to seize it.

When you want someone's house, you take it by fraud and violence.

You cheat a man of his property, stealing his family's inheritance.

³ But this is what the Lord says: "I will reward your evil with evil; you won't be able to pull your neck out of the noose.

You will no longer walk around proudly, for it will be a terrible time."

⁴ In that day your enemies will make fun of you by singing this song of despair about you:

"We are finished, completely ruined! God has confiscated our land, taking it from us. He has given our fields to those who betrayed us."

⁵ Others will set your boundaries then, and the Lord's people will have no say in how the land is divided. ⁶ "Don't say such things," the people respond.

"Don't prophesy like that. Such disasters will never come our way!"

⁷ Should you talk that way, O family of Israel?

Will the Lord's Spirit have patience with such behaviour?

If you would do what is right, you would find my words comforting.

⁸ Yet to this very hour my people rise against me like an enemy!

You steal the shirts right off the backs of those who trusted you, making them as ragged as men returning from battle.

⁹ You have evicted women from their pleasant homes and forever stripped their children of all that God would give them.

¹⁰ Up! Begone! This is no longer your land and home, for you have filled it with sin and ruined it completely.

¹¹ Suppose a prophet full of lies would say to you, "I'll preach to you the joys of wine and alcohol!"

That's just the kind of prophet you would like!

12 *"Someday, O Israel, I will gather you; I will gather the remnant who are left. I will bring you together again like sheep in a pen, like a flock in its pasture.*

Yes, your land will again be filled with noisy crowds!

13 *Your leader will break out and lead you out of exile, out through the gates of the enemy cities, back to your own land.*

Your king will lead you; the Lord himself will guide you."

Whereas chapter 1 outlines the judgement that is coming to the people in response to their godless and rebellious ways and their flagrant rejection of true worship, chapter 2 demonstrates how that disregard for God has changed the character of the people. In chapter 2, Micah paints a stark picture of the oppression that the people are being subjected to under the current rule. This picture is one of brutality and greed masquerading as justice - and what is worse, it is being done by people who pretend to follow God's rule and who give the outward impression of being just and godly. Micah gives an unrelenting diatribe against those who have distorted and twisted the rule of God to suit their own agendas and to achieve personal wealth and greatness at the expense of God's glory. Disregard of God and a disregard for the wellbeing of people are linked by these chapters.

Talk about verses 1 & 2.

What is the focus of the wealthy in these verses?

What are the charges that Micah is bringing against the powerful in the land?

As the prophet of God, Micah is declaring these people and practises to be evil. (verse 3) The actions of the arrogant wealthy had led to the destruction of the inheritance systems and the subsistence living of small families and farmers who were now deliberately forced into poverty. The response to this evil will be measured in kind. Those targeted by God for their evil will find themselves bowed by God. This will be a fitting punishment for their crime of oppression. Although we find the term 'evil' jarring when applied to God's activities, we do well to remember that this is set as a balance to the 'evil schemes' of people. David Prior helps us to understand this difficult concept

The sense would be that, when people behave toward God in a way that he regards as evil, God's response is to behave towards them in a way that they regard as evil. The point is that rebellious humanity and God have entirely different definitions of what is evil and offensive. We deem evil anything that impairs our convenience and comforts; God deems evil anything which ignores his commandments and character. P128

Discuss Prior's description of 'what God regards as evil' and the 'people's view of evil'. Check Micah 2 in a variety of translations to see how widely 'evil and wickedness' are used in the chapter.

As we have seen in chapter 1, the judgement will be more widespread than the specific people who are scheming and plotting: there is a more general canker at

work among the people, a persistence to their worship of idols and their rejection of God's ways. A judgement against the 'family' or nation is pending and there will be wholesale devastation of the nation of Israel.

Again, this is a hard concept - that the innocent will suffer along with the guilty. The Assyrians will come and those who were once wealthy will be put to ruin. As for those who were poor and oppressed under the previous regime - will a change of oppressor make any difference to them?

We can be unwitting perpetrators of oppression.

Talk about our personal guilt in the oppressive policies and practises of our own culture.

What might they include? What can be done?

Micah is, unsurprisingly, not much loved for his prophetic words (6 & 11).

Speaking in a time when the wealthy were prospering at the expense of the poor, they wished only to hear supportive and acceptable words from their prophet.

Micah is God's true prophet and speaks the unacceptable truth much as Elijah had in the time of Ahab and Jezebel.

Who is/are speaking the uncomfortable truths of God in your generation? How are you sure that their words are 'of God' and not 'of people'?

The closing verses of chapter 2 talk about the 'remnant'. We remember that God is still God of the Covenant and that his promises to Abraham and Moses remain valid. For those who remain faithful, there will be redemption - but these people are a tiny fraction of the whole. They become known as 'the remnant'... We notice that 'the Lord himself' appears as a guide to the remnant making their way back to the promised and holy places for God's people.

It is a long way off - but there is a glimmer of hope for those who continue as 'sheep of God's pasture'.

What does 'remaining faithful' look like in your church today?

Reflection & Refreshment *25 minutes*

Over refreshments, consider the following words of Stephen Um:

What it is challenging to do is to acknowledge the fact that our possessions often come at the expense of someone who lacks the advantages that we do have - even the fair ones that can be celebrated. We can easily oppress someone else without an ounce of malice in our hearts. It can be very subtle and yet it can be very real. Oppression is real not only because someone is devising it explicitly or obviously. Oppression is not real only for the person who thinks about it in his or her sleep. Oppression is real even when it is not deliberate or malicious. P33

How can you, your group, your church be part of the solution?

Pray together.

Session 2: What is Required of Me?

As you Gather 5-10 minutes

What do you like about courtroom dramas?

Who is your favourite lawyer - either fictional or real?

What is it about them has made an impression on you?

Pray & Worship 10 minutes

Sing a hymn or a song which declares your commitment to God .

Pray

1. Prayers of repentance.
2. Prayers of faith in God's power and rule.
3. For a nation to be turned back to God.
4. For greater faith in God's trustworthiness.
5. For a church which is loving, kind and just.
6. For your minister and church leadership.

Read the Word 50 minutes

Micah 6:1-16

NLT

Listen to what the Lord is saying:

"Stand up and state your case against me. Let the mountains and hills be called to witness your complaints. 2 And now, O mountains, listen to the Lord's complaint!

He has a case against his people. He will bring charges against Israel.

3 "O my people, what have I done to you?

What have I done to make you tired of me? Answer me!

4 For I brought you out of Egypt and redeemed you from slavery.

I sent Moses, Aaron, and Miriam to help you. 5 Don't you remember, my people, how King Balak of Moab tried to have you cursed and how Balaam son of Beor blessed you instead? And remember your journey from Acacia Grove to Gilgal, when I, the Lord, did everything I could to teach you about my faithfulness."

6 What can we bring to the Lord? Should we bring him burnt offerings?

Should we bow before God Most High with offerings of yearling calves?

7 Should we offer him thousands of rams and ten thousand rivers of olive oil?

Should we sacrifice our firstborn children to pay for our sins?

8 No, O people, the Lord has told you what is good,

and this is what he requires of you: to do what is right, to love mercy,

and to walk humbly with your God.

9 Fear the Lord if you are wise! His voice calls to everyone in Jerusalem:

"The armies of destruction are coming; the Lord is sending them.

10 What shall I say about the homes of the wicked

filled with treasures gained by cheating?

What about the disgusting practice of measuring out grain with dishonest measures?

11 How can I tolerate your merchants who use dishonest scales and weights?

12 The rich among you have become wealthy through extortion and violence.

Your citizens are so used to lying that their tongues can no longer tell the truth.

13 "Therefore, I will wound you! I will bring you to ruin for all your sins.

14 You will eat but never have enough. Your hunger pangs and emptiness will remain.

And though you try to save your money, it will come to nothing in the end.

You will save a little, but I will give it to those who conquer you.

15 You will plant crops but not harvest them.

You will press your olives but not get enough oil to anoint yourselves.

You will trample the grapes but get no juice to make your wine.

16 You keep only the laws of evil King Omri; you follow only the example of wicked King Ahab! Therefore, I will make an example of you, bringing you to complete ruin.

You will be treated with contempt, mocked by all who see you.”

This chapter falls into three sections, set out like a court hearing, it contains the basis for the charge, the evidence and the judgement. The people of Israel have made their judgement against Yahweh in their response to his faithfulness. Now, Yahweh will make his pronouncement against their rejection of him and his laws.

Verses 1-5: The charges.

In answer to the people’s charges against Yahweh, he now brings his own charges. Yahweh outlines his faithfulness in providing redemption, leadership, protection and adventure. He is reliable and not boring. The Exodus is an iconic marker in the history of Israel. It is the One Thing that they could look back on and remember confidently that God’s power is ‘mighty to save’. It was now being viewed with complacency & as ‘out of touch’ with the current state of the world.

Talk about the power of God which has saved you and how your testimony is still vibrant with faith.

What things have been factors in reducing the ‘joy of your salvation’ over the passage of time?

How is God’s greatness shown in your story?

Talk about the people who have led you in your faith - both ministers and friends. How does this show you God’s faithfulness?

Look up the story of Balaam & Balak in Numbers 22-23. Talk about God’s protection.

Look up the references to Shittim & Gilgal in Joshua 3 & 4, discuss the adventure and delight in being present to see God’s actions.

Verses 6-8: The Way Out.

The response here is one that shows an extravagant and over-the-top approach to sacrifice and offering. The calves were costly and their offering is plural.

Verse 7a looks like a royal offering such as King David would have made, extravagant and rich. Verse 7b is horrible, but is not an unprecedented action from the Kings of Israel (see Manasseh; 2 Kings 21:6).

Talk together about offerings that are showy in their extravagance and in their extreme. How does God respond to such offerings? With a gospel lens attached, what areas of the New Testament are still addressing the show of the sacrifice?

In verse 8, the much quoted words of requirement for a faithful life of walking in step with the Lord, keeping to the relationship spelt out in the Law and

Prophets. Keeping this covenant relationship is the way out of the mess. They have already been told this...

Micah's contemporaries were living evidence of what happens to people who decide to dispense with God, to walk in pride without God. Instead of responding to the imperative of doing justice in humble obedience to God's commandments, they had reached the point where they had come to 'abhor justice' (3:9). Rather than show kindness (or 'compassion' or 'steadfast love'), particularly to those less fortunate and less successful, they pursued a ruthless policy of exploitation, greed, fraud and murder. Prior p 177

Kindness and Justice are key to living the Godly life. Stephen Um (p118-9) reminds us that; *In ancient culture, the word Micah uses for 'kindness' (hesed) could be translated as unqualified love; limitless love; stubborn, unceasing, dogged love that says, "I refuse to give up on you, even if everyone else tells me I should."*

What does verse 8 teach us about the kind of love God has for his covenant people?

How is that love to be reflected in the actions of the people?

Verses 9-16. The Judgement.

Yahweh's requirements have not been met. There will be consequences. Of course, as Micah spells out the issues that are besetting the people of Israel; that they have thrown out loving kindness and justice in favour of deceit and wickedness; they are past the point where returning to God will seem like an attractive option.

Look at 9-12 and talk about the depth of sin that the people of Israel have fallen into. Name the different charges and talk about how the same evils affect us today. How is Micah relevant in your culture in the 21st Century?

The consequences will be that they will be overrun by their enemies and their land will be taken from them. **13-16** show how all the city will suffer - the city meaning all the people who had fallen from God's rule. The judgement of God falls on all the people and not just on the few.

Look carefully at the nature of the punishment.

Consider how it ties in with the nature of the offence.

current greed will lead to constant lack of satisfaction, etc.

Reflection & Refreshment *25 minutes*

Over refreshments, consider and pray about how you and your group - or your church if possible - can be more proactive in:

Loving kindness/mercy

Doing Justice

Walking in step with God

What will this look like on a daily basis?

Short Study: “*The Remnant*”

Opening Thoughts:

What beautiful or useful things can be made out of remnants?

Consider the use of food ingredients, fabric, other materials such as wood or metal or waste...

Opening Prayer:

God of Justice and God of Glory,

I thank you for your faithfulness and your steadfast love toward your people.

May I forever walk in step with you and keep your Covenant. Thank you for the blessing of Jesus who is my Lord and Saviour. Amen

Micah 4 Read to verse 8

NIV®

In the last days the mountain of the Lord's temple will be established as the highest of the mountains; it will be exalted above the hills, and peoples will stream to it. ² Many nations will come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the temple of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths." The law will go out from Zion, the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. ³ He will judge between many peoples and will settle disputes for strong nations far and wide. They will beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore.

For your consideration:

Does remaining faithful to a minority cause make you an idiot or a hero?

Think about various causes you have supported for too long or gave up on before they were over and so contributed to the demise of something good...

Micah's Israel was a long way from the vision of the people innumerable that God had shown Abraham. Faithless and wicked, these people were cheats and greedy, not people who followed the Law and the Prophets. God's judgement against this wickedness would lead to generations of hopelessness and struggle as the people of Israel were taken along with their lands and all their wealth. In the middle of the prophecy, Micah paints a picture of the promise that living faithfully in step with God will bring. It also paints a picture of the reality of God's power: even when the 700+ year old people have failed, God does not fail. His mountain is higher than the 'high places' on which idols and false gods are worshipped. God's rule is one of peace and of justice which will have consequences.

What are the consequences of God's rule for the nations?

What are the consequences of God's rule for the faithless Jerusalem?

The remnant will be those who have kept faithful to God and honoured him by keeping his Law and paying attention to the words of the Prophets.

This remnant will not be the scraps and waste of something that was once great - it will be the good which is left when the bad and rotten is taken away. The remnant will be the start of a new people who will be built into the great people innumerable as promised to Abraham & Sarah.

The vision of God's peace and rule is beautiful. It shows the world living under Yahweh's rule and the gentle grace that flows from living in step with God.

*I will make the lame my remnant, those driven away a strong nation.
The Lord will rule over them in Mount Zion from that day and forever. V7 NIV*

Of course, in Micah's day, the lame were those who would not be able to walk very well, who certainly had no military usefulness in defending a nation, and yet these are the ones whom God is going to make into his own mighty people. Their strength is their faithfulness to God and their love of God's priorities for themselves, other people and the rest of the world. There is no strength like it.

Once the strong nation, full of pride and arrogance in its own abilities is brought low, God will gather up the least and last and rebuilt the covenant people.

Jesus would be the one born in Bethlehem Ephathrah, the least of Judah's cities - into the line of David who was the least of Jesse's sons.

Jesus will be full of loving kindness and mercy; he will do justice and walk in step with the plans and purposes of God. He is the ultimate remnant on which the people of God will be built - without a break in the ancestral line.

In today's colloquial or slang speech, the 'lame' are those who have no credibility or social currency. They are mocked openly and despised for their lack of guile and their inability to fit in. Those who are lame are so absorbed with what their world looks like that they take no notice of the fashion and trends around them. These are the people Jesus came to serve and save and as a consequence they are the people who populate the church of Christ; not cool but totally focussed on the things of God and on honouring the people of the world as God intended -without deceit cheating. With justice, love and honour.

We talk about Jesus being the one who is the 'Yes' to all God's promises and about God being the promise keeper in the making and maintaining of his covenant.

Talk about God as promise keeper in Micah's prophecy.

How do the people know that God can be trusted?

How do you know that God can be trusted?

Pray:

For a heart of love for the world. An attitude of joyful obedience to God. A desire to love as he loves. A willingness to be considered nothing so the the blessing comes from God alone. Pray that the world might come to know salvation through Jesus Christ. Amen

Bibliography

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Encourage One Another & Build Each Other Up 1 Thessalonians 5: 11

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