

# ANCIENT WORDS FOR MODERN DISCIPLES

September 4, 2022 | Sorrow Fading into Hope (Micah)

## PREPARATION

### GETTING READY

Micah's name means "who is Yahweh." How would you answer the question posed by Micah's name?

Read Micah.

Ask God to help you understand the horrible reality of sin and the wonderful freedom of hope.

## THIS WEEK

### KEY BIBLICAL TRUTH

The people of Israel faced certain judgment, but a hope for the future remained.

### THEOLOGY APPLIED

Although we are guilty of sin, trusting in Christ provides us hope for the future.

### MEDITATE

*"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 it shall be lifted up above the hills; and peoples shall flow to it" (Micah 4:1).*

## GETTING STARTED

+This section introduces the prophet Micah and considers the purpose of his book.

Q: *Some of the historical detail behind Micah's ministry is provided by 2 Kings 15:32–16:20 and chapters 18–20. What are some of the most important details these chapters give for understanding Micah's message?*

Q: *Why would Micah's message be difficult to deliver when the nation faced threats from outside?*

Micah was a contemporary of the prophet Isaiah. He witnessed some of the most significant moments in the Old Testament. He witnessed the fall of the northern kingdom, Israel, to the Assyrians in 722 (2 Kings 17) and the near collapse and miraculous deliverance of the southern kingdom, Judah, about twenty years later. More than a hundred years after his ministry, he appears in the book of Jeremiah. Jeremiah predicted doom for the nation of Judah. When Jeremiah's prophecy was not immediately fulfilled, some people wanted to put Jeremiah to death for false prophecy, but others pointed to Micah 3:12, which also was not immediately fulfilled and even still awaited fulfillment, and argued that Jeremiah should not be killed since Micah was not.

Micah's prophecies shift between two extremes. On the one hand, he foresaw the absolute devastation approaching the people because of their wickedness. On the other, he maintained hope that after judgment God would gather a remnant from His people for whom He would fulfill all His covenant promises. The book of Micah is structured in three parts, each beginning with judgment and ending with hope.

Q: *Why is it crucial to hold God's judgment of sin and His mercy on repentant sinners together?*

Q: *How does the structure of Micah's book point us to the death of Christ?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – The shifts between judgment and hope in Micah illustrate two aspects of God's character that we must constantly hold in tension. God cannot tolerate sin and will judge sinners, yet He also desires to show mercy to sinners who repent. Although we may prefer to focus on His mercy for sinners, we can never completely exclude God's judgment. In the same way, we can never become so consumed with His judgment that we miss God's grace for ourselves and for others. These shifts in emphasis in Micah's message ultimately point us toward Christ. In Christ's death on the cross, we see both God's judgment poured out on sin and His mercy provided for sinners.

## ■ UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

+Most people believe the book of Micah has been arranged into three sections—chapters 1 and 2, chapters 3–5, and chapters 6 and 7. Each section begins with a command to “hear” or “listen.” In this arrangement, oracles of doom are followed by oracles of salvation and hope.

1. HOPE AFTER JUDGMENT
2. HOPE IN THE MESSIAH
3. HOPE OF VINDICATION

## GOING DEEPER

*+This part of the lesson will examine each section of Micah in further detail, beginning with the judgment Micah foresaw and concluding with the hope he prophesied.*

### 1. HOPE AFTER JUDGMENT

#### ■ MICAH 1–2

**Q:** *How is God’s coming described in Micah 1:3–4? Why is God’s coming foreboding?*

**Q:** *What reasons for God’s judgment did Micah give in these chapters?*

Micah wasted no time in getting to the main point of his message. God was coming in judgment (Micah 1:2–4). Micah described God’s arrival in catastrophic detail. The whole earth was being undone as God approached. The undoing of the earth matches the destruction God brought upon the nation. Samaria, the capital of the northern kingdom, was made into a heap of rubble. The destruction was so widespread that even the foundations of the city were visible. If the city was in shambles, what of the people in it? They were ushered into exile, which meant they had lost the land God had promised them as an inheritance (Exodus 3:8), doomed to live in upheaval in a foreign land with no prospects for a better future.

Why had God’s destruction come against this people? Micah briefly mentioned idolatry (Micah 1:7). Idolatry was a recurring problem among the people. Although it is explicitly forbidden in the second commandment (Exodus 20:4), the people could not keep themselves from following the sinful practices of the surrounding nations. They wanted to worship how they wanted rather than following the law of God. Micah also alluded to injustice among the people. It appears, in concurrence with Isaiah 5:8–10, that wealthy landowners were exploiting the poor to increase their fortunes. In the law of Moses, the people were told to behave generously to their fellow Israelites (Exodus 22:25; Deuteronomy 15:7–11). Furthermore, they were to take measures to ensure that every family maintained its inheritance from God and thus could not become stuck in perpetual poverty (Leviticus 25:23–28). In Micah’s day, the wealthy overlooked such prohibitions on their way to trample those in need. God would not endure this disobedience forever.

🔗: *Why does Micah 2:6 say “do not preach”? Who is speaking?*

🔗: *Can you put Micah 2:11 into your own words?*

**APPLICATION POINT** –Micah declared that God’s judgment was imminent for the wicked people, but they would not listen! Rather than confront their sin, they sought either to silence the messenger (Micah 2:6) or to find another messenger (Micah 2:11). How often do we do the same thing? One of our biggest problems is that we do not weep enough over our own sins. We think God only cares about “big sins” and is unconcerned with our “minor transgressions.” We want preachers who make us smile rather than those who bring us to tears with the reality of our own wickedness. The problem, of course, is that ignoring our sin and seeking a more pleasant message does not change the reality of our sinful hearts. We are just as foolish as Micah’s audience. If we were truly convinced of what the gospel says about us, we would not have a cavalier attitude toward our sin or God’s holiness. Rather than thinking we are the last person the preacher is talking about, we would know he is speaking directly to us. Rather than seeking the message that makes us laugh the hardest, we would listen to the one that makes us mourn the most.

🔗: *Although Micah 2:12–13 anticipates an optimistic future, many people recognize an element of judgment in these verses. What are they seeing?*

🔗: *What metaphors does Micah 2:12–13 use for God?*

Although Micah 1 and 2 primarily focus on the people's sin and God's ensuing judgment, these chapters close with a word of hopeful expectation. God's judgment would come. The people would go into exile, but God would call a remnant of His people from exile to return to Him so that He might fulfill the promises He made to them. Micah centers his hope on God Himself. God would be like a shepherd who finds His flock and gathers them under His protection. He would be like a king who leads His people in battle. Nothing would keep God from preserving His remnant. Like other Old Testament authors (2 Samuel 5:2; Psalm 78:70–72), Micah combined these images to describe God as the people's Shepherd-King.

❓: *How does Israel's experience [exile and restoration] mirror what God would do for His people in the new covenant?*

❓: *Why is it crucial that Israel's restoration is accomplished by God?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – Just as God rescued a remnant of Israel from exile, He will also rescue a remnant of humanity from exile. When Adam and Eve were expelled from God's presence in the garden, they were exiled from the land God had given them (Genesis 3:23–24). In Christ, God rescues a remnant of humanity from exile and brings us back to Himself. Israel's story is a model of what God is doing for all of humanity. This means that even as we participate in the same kind of sins Micah described in chapters 1 and 2, we also have the same hope Micah described in Micah 2:12–13 if we repent of sin and turn to Christ. Christ is our Shepherd-King who protects His flock (John 10:1–18).

## 2. HOPE IN THE MESSIAH

### ■ MICAH 3–5

❓: *For what did Micah condemn the rulers and prophets?*

❓: *How did Micah describe the judgment coming upon these leaders?*

In Micah 3, the prophet continued his onslaught against the rulers and prophets. In gruesome fashion, Micah declared that the rulers of the people sustained themselves by consuming the people (Micah 3:2–3). Both the

rulers and prophets were for sale (Micah 3:5, 11). A favorable word or decision was available for money, not justice. Sin had infiltrated every part of Israelite society. There was nothing left but for God to raze it to the ground (Micah 3:12).

❓: *What does Jeremiah 26:19 reveal about Micah's message of doom?*

❓: *How does corruption enslave even those who profit from it? How does this contrast with Micah's words concerning his own prophetic ministry (Micah 3:8)?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – Micah 3:12 predicts the destruction of Jerusalem because of the wickedness of its leaders. Micah did not mention any possibility of God relenting, but according to Jeremiah 26:19, this is exactly what happened. Hezekiah and the leaders of Jerusalem heeded Micah's words and repented of their wickedness. In response, God relented from the disaster He had planned to bring on the people. Jeremiah 26:19 is remarkable for several reasons. It demonstrates that God is always ready to respond to repentance. No matter how deeply you are caught in sin, if you repent, He is ready to forgive. It also demonstrates the kind of legacy that repentance provides for coming generations. The men of Jeremiah's time recognized that Hezekiah had responded to Micah's message with repentance and that they were not responding similarly to Jeremiah's message. Ultimately, disobedience won out against Jeremiah, but what a legacy Hezekiah left! Of course, a legacy of repentance requires us to acknowledge our sin rather than ignore it. It also means we are open and remorseful about our sin for the future generations. It is possible that what future generation need most from us is not perfect role models who never sway but examples of repentance even in the midst of terrible sin.

❓: *How does the hopeful vision described in Micah 4:1 correspond to the devastation anticipated in Micah 3:12?*

❓: *How does the ruler anticipated in Micah 5:2 contrast with the rulers described in Micah 3:1?*

At the center of the book of Micah stands a remarkable message of hope. Whereas Micah foresaw a time when the temple mount would be a heap of ruins (Micah 3:12), he also foresaw a time when the mountain of the

Lord would become the epicenter of a new humanity to which all the nations would flow, not to conquer but to worship! Where the leaders during Micah's time sustained themselves by exploiting the people (Micah 3:2–3), the people in Micah's vision of the latter days would flock to God to learn of His righteousness (Micah 4:2). Furthermore, the future leader of God's people would not feed off the people (Micah 3:3) but shepherd them (5:4). As dire as the situation was in Micah 3, the prophet looked forward to a future in which God would act on behalf of His people and set up an enduring kingdom that would not fall to foreign siege.

🔍: *How do the reversals described in chapters 4 and 5 illustrate God's power to reverse the influence of sin in your life?*

🔍: *Micah said the coming of the ruler coming from Bethlehem, whom we know to be Jesus, "is from of old, from ancient days" (5:2b). What implications does this have for Jesus's reign?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – Sin brings enormous sorrow and grief, and its consequences are often cyclical. One sin leads to consequences that invite additional sin, and before long, a person has become so wrapped up in sin and devastation that escape seems impossible. But Micah shows us that nothing is impossible with God. There is no situation so dire that He cannot bring redemption. There is no sin so wicked that He will refuse to save. Anyone who repents of sin and yields to the ruler "whose coming forth is from of old" can discover the wonderful blessings of God's forgiveness and restoration.

### 3. HOPE OF VINDICATION

#### 📖 MICAH 6-7

🔍: *Why did Micah mention Moses, Aaron, and Miriam (Micah 6:4)?*

🔍: *What was Micah describing in Micah 6:6-7?*

In Micah 6, God indicted the people for their failure to keep the principles of the covenant with Him. God had kept His covenant promises. He delivered the people from slavery. He provided them with competent leadership.

He rescued them from those who sought to do them harm (Micah 6:4). But the people miserably failed to keep God in the place He demanded. Israel evidently believed they could appease Him with sacrifices and that He did not really care about their moral and spiritual lives. Micah directly confronted their erroneous view of God. In Micah 6:6–7, the prophet described a series of sacrifices, each escalating in value, even concluding his list with child sacrifice. (Micah did this for rhetorical purposes. The Old Testament prohibits child sacrifice [Leviticus 18:21; 20:2–5; Deuteronomy 18:10]). These sacrifices, however, were worthless apart from a heart that seeks justice and godliness.

♀: *In what ways do you exchange rituals or outward displays of religiosity for true godliness?*

♀: *How must Christians respond when it seems as though godly people are disappearing from our society [Micah 7:2–3]?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – The people’s error may seem obvious to us. Of course, God cares more about the spiritual condition of our hearts than He does empty outward gestures, but we can often be guilty of the same mistakes. This is what happens when we point to our church attendance, tithing record, or volunteer work at church to excuse the areas of our lives we refuse to bring under God’s control. We substitute the righteousness we want for the righteousness God demands. It is good for us to remember that we never set the terms by which we are obedient to Him. God never settles just for the righteousness we want to give. He requires us to submit to His rule in every area of our lives, not just the areas we are comfortable with.

♀: *How does Micah 7:12 pick up the theme started in Micah 6:4?*

♀: *What did Micah base his hope of God’s salvation on?*

Micah concluded by shifting one last time from God’s judgment to His salvation (Micah 7:8–20). Although God would hold the people accountable for their sin and send them into exile, this would not be His last word for His people. God would restore His fallen people and humiliate the nations that devastated them. Micah based his belief in God’s salvation on God’s character as expressed in Exodus 34:6–7. God is compassionate to those who seek after Him. He is willing to forgive sin.



Q: *Micah witnessed the declining godliness of the society around him. What challenges and temptations emerge from such a context?*

Q: *How does God's grace give you the courage to stand firm when your faith is challenged?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – Micah believed the godly were perishing from among his people, but rather than joining the wicked, he resolved to look for God's salvation (Micah 7:7). Today, as people have less and less regard for God, Christians will face a constant demand to conform to the godlessness of society. The appeal of the majority and the yearning to be part of the crowd can be powerful. But believers must follow the example of Micah and look for the salvation of God. When God arrives in judgment, it will not matter what the majority thinks of us. It will not matter how harshly we have been ridiculed for our beliefs. All that will matter is our faithfulness to Him and our commitment to walk in His ways, whatever the cost.

## NEXT STEPS

Micah held God's judgment and His salvation in constant tension. After looking at his message, we must resolve to do the same. Take some time this week to write down a prayer of confession. Acknowledge the sins you are struggling with to God. Acknowledge that you deserve to receive God's wrath because of your disobedience. Conclude your prayer by rejoicing in the salvation you have in Christ. Praise Him for the plan He put into place to forgive sinners. This plan is evident in Micah and was initiated long before (Ephesians 1:4).

## PRAY

*+Use these prayer points to instill the lessons you learned from God's Word this week.*

*-Father, forgive me for the ways in which I have failed to act in godliness and righteousness.*

*-Lord Jesus, the salvation Micah foresaw ultimately finds its fulfillment in you. Thank you for giving your life so that sinners may receive forgiveness.*

*-Father, bring people like Micah into my life who will tell me the things I need to hear rather than just the things I want to hear.*

*-God, forgive me for thinking I can obey you in the ways I want in place of the ways you require obedience.*