



Sunday School Lesson Summary for July 1, 2007
Released on June 27, 2007

"Micah Announced God's Requirements"

Printed Text: Micah 3:1-4; 6:6-8

Background Scripture: Micah 2:1-4; 3:1-5, 8-12; 6:6-8

Devotional Reading: Hebrews 6:6-12

Micah 3:1-4

1 And I said, Hear, I pray you, O heads of Jacob, and ye princes of the house of Israel; Is it not for you to know judgment?

2 Who hate the good, and love the evil; who pluck off their skin from off them, and their flesh from off their bones;

3 Who also eat the flesh of my people, and flay their skin from off them; and they break their bones, and chop them in pieces, as for the pot, and as flesh within the caldron.

4 Then shall they cry unto the Lord, but he will not hear them: he will even hide his face from them at that time, as they have behaved themselves ill in their doings.

Micah 6:6-8

6 Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God? shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves of a year old?

7 Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or 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?

8 He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?

Today's Aim

Facts: to examine how Israel had forgotten God's requirements

Principle: to understand that God requires us to live a just life, love mercy, and walk in humility with Him.

Application: to help students see that we need to fulfill God's requirements in order to please Him.

Introduction - The Walk of Humility

At his inauguration in 1977, incoming American President Jimmy Carter used the historic Bible that had been employed by George Washington at his own inauguration. Carter said, "Here before me is the Bible used in the inauguration of our first President, in 1789, and I have just taken the oath of office on the Bible my mother gave me a few years ago." Carter then read Micah 6:8, his key verse. Carter thus recognized that even the most powerful men on earth are called "to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly."

Yet humility, in particular, seems to be in scarce supply these days. We see a seemingly unlimited procession of people seeking to become famous celebrities. In the last century, a famous boxer was widely known for boasting, "I am the greatest!" More recently, we have seen the rise of so-called "reality" television, where ordinary people are thrust into a celebrity-type spotlight. In the 1960s, pop philosopher Andy Warhol predicted, "In the future, everyone will be famous for fifteen minutes." Warhol later reversed this line to say, "In fifteen minutes, everybody will be famous." The lists of famous celebrities seem to become increasingly crowded.

The Bible teaches us that "before honor is humility" (Proverbs 15:33). The humbled/exalted paradox is that those who strive to be honored will not succeed in God's eyes, but those who serve humbly, without concern for applause, will be honored. Those seeking celebrity status should remember this warning: "God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble" (James 4:6). Humility, then, is not an occasional choice. For the Christian it must be a walk, a lifestyle (compare Philippians 2:3).

As we seek to serve the Lord, we should begin by asking, "What does God expect?" Fortunately, we do not have to guess the answer to this question. One source of information for us is found in the writings of God's prophets. These men left a marvelous record of their messages: Bible texts that provide a clear picture of what God demands from His people.

Lesson Background

Micah is one of the great eighth-century prophets of Israel. That was also the time frame of Isaiah, Hosea, and Amos. Micah 1:1 records that he prophesied during the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of the southern kingdom of Judah. However, this verse also tells us that his prophecies were for both Judah (with its capital city of Jerusalem) and the northern kingdom of Israel (with its capital in Samaria).

The reign of those three kings spanned the period of approximately 750–690 b.c., roughly 60 years. This was a tumultuous time for the people of God. Micah lived through the destruction of the northern kingdom in 722 b.c. by the Assyrians (2 Kings 18:9–11). About 20 years later, he was probably an eyewitness to a similar threat to Jerusalem in 701 b.c. That time, however, God miraculously delivered Judah from the Assyrian menace by destroying 185,000 members of the Assyrian army (2 Kings 19:35).

There are strong connections between Micah and Isaiah, indicating they may have been colleagues. For example, Isaiah 2:2–4 and Micah 4:1–3 are nearly identical texts. Both prophets share messages of the necessity for the people of God to repent and work for justice. Both preach the future hope of God’s coming Messiah. We also know that the ministry of Micah influenced the later prophets of Judah (see Jeremiah 26:18, 19).

Micah’s words are both forceful and eloquent. He was well aware of the empowerment of God’s Spirit to give him his prophetic message (Micah 3:8). He also knew that his message was not well received by some, and that there were those who wanted to silence him (Micah 2:6, 7). He indicted Israel with God’s “controversy,” meaning God’s charge of Israel’s failure to uphold the covenant of obedience and righteousness (Micah 6:1, 2). This “controversy” with His people was not unique to Micah (see Jeremiah 25:31; Hosea 4:1; 12:2).

Micah’s plea was that God’s people must realize that if they did not seek justice in their society, then God would purge them of evil by allowing their destruction. While Christians are not citizens of Micah’s Israel, that prophet’s call for holiness and righteousness sounds a needed plea to the church today.

Micah’s Warning (Micah 3:1-4)

1. To whom did Micah first address his message, and what were these people supposed to be doing? (Micah 3:1)

Verse 1 tells us that Micah address his message to the “heads of Jacob” and the “princes of the house of Israel.” Micah addressed them again in verse 9: “Here this, I pray you, ye heads of the house of Jacob, and the princes of the house of Israel, that abhor judgment, and pervert all equity.” These people were the rulers of the Israelites, and they were supposed to set the example of righteousness for the people to follow. It was their duty to render justice to all people. Instead, they were rendering decisions that were not objective. There was no equity, which means that there was no just, impartial, or fair relationship with the people who were under those in authority.

2. What pointed question did Micah ask the rulers that should have provoked serious thought? (v. 1)

Micah asks, “Is it not for you to know judgment?” The Hebrew word translated “judgment” means a verdict, a judicial pronouncement protecting the rights of wronged people. God expected them to establish and enforce justice.

This question should have caused them to stop and think about what they were doing and evaluate themselves in the light of God’s eyes. The rulers should have the best knowledge of what was right and wrong in God’s sight. The fact is that when the leaders of the land are corrupt, the people will be too.

3. How did Micah describe the ways in which the rulers were destroying the people? (vs. 2-3)

Some of Micah’s examples are pretty graphic. They are described as being vicious barbarians who brutally slaughtered animals as they prepared them for eating. Their actions, however, were perpetrated against poor, innocent, and defenseless people. These actions manifested themselves as a direct result of their hatred for good and love for evil. The leaders hated doing good and loved doing evil.

4. How were they doing the opposite of what was expected of them?

A study of the verbs used here reveals that their attitudes were habitual ones; in other words, they continually wanted to do wickedness and avoid godliness.

Micah employs some of the most violently graphic language of the Old Testament to drive home his point. God says that the leaders of Israel have exploited *my people*. These people are the very ones the leaders should have been protecting. Micah uses the horrific language of cannibalism, saying, in effect, “You have eaten my precious children.”

This does not refer to actual cannibalism, but to the relentless economic oppression of the poor people of Israel by the rulers. Those in power have manipulated the

system to seize the property (and therefore the livelihood) of the lower classes (Micah 2:2). They have been consumed by greediness and wickedness (Micah 2:1).

In today's world, much of the same is happening-not only among rulers but also in the lifestyles of common people. The wicked repression of some dictators reveal this, as do the attitudes of people we know.

As we consider what the Jewish leaders did in today's passage, we really need to consider our ways. Do we purposely hurt someone physically or mentally? Do we allow others to be mistreated by ungodly (and even so called godly) folks? Are we guilty of taking advantage of someone? It is one thing for people in the world to do this; it is entirely another thing for Christians to participate in such acts of injustice. As Christians, we need to demonstrate Christ's love towards everyone and set the example of how people should be treated.

5. How did God say He was going to punish them for their deeds? (v. 4)

Listen to this warning that the prophet Jeremiah once gave the people of Judah: "Thus saith the Lord. Behold, I will bring evil upon them, which they shall not be able to escape: and though they shall cry unto me, I will not hearken unto them" (Jer. 11:11). Micah warned the leaders of Israel that if they will not hearken unto God's warnings now, then when their time of desperate need arrived, God would simply ignore them. No matter how desperately they cried, He would hide His face.

"Then shall the seers be ashamed, and the diviners be confounded: yea, they shall cover their lips; for there is no answer of God" (Mic. 3:7). These cries will not be cries of repentance, but cries of desperation, asking God for deliverance. Even in captivity, the leaders still wanted to do their own thing. God wanted the people to repent; He wanted to deliver the nation from their sin. Captivity was coming, and when that time arrived, God was going to do nothing to stop it. This would be so because "they have behaved themselves ill in their doings" (v. 4). Why would God suddenly come to their aid in time of need when up to that time they had ignored Him? (See Proverbs 1:23-26)

This is a powerful and important message for today. In the first chapter of Proverbs, wisdom is personified as someone crying out to those carrying out their normal activities of life (Proverbs 1:20-23). As a warning to those who refuse to listen, God said "Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded; but ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof: I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh" (vs. 24-26).

6. What lesson should we learn from this warning to Judah leaders?

God has given us his Word so that we can strive for holiness. We cannot ignore or defy God and His will and then expect Him to rescue us when we get into trouble because of the way we lived. Instead, God will allow us suffer the consequences for our actions (cf. Proverbs 1:23-26).

God's Requirements (Micah 6:6-8)

7. What questions did Micah ask on behalf of the people? (v. 6-7)

The challenge God had issued for Judah to stand before Him and testify gives us the impression of a typical courtroom scene. Someone was needed to testify before the Judge. Now it was as if Micah stood on behalf of the people and began to ask questions in return. What should be brought before the Lord in order to satisfy Him? Would burnt offerings using yearling calves do? How about thousands of rams or tens of thousands of rivers of oil?

Micah ends the list with an unspeakable offering: human sacrifice of a *firstborn* child. This has dual significance for the Israelites of Micah's time. First, they are aware of God's testing of Abraham, who was commanded to offer his beloved son Isaac as a burnt offering (Genesis 22:2). The lesson of that story, however, is that while God has a right to demand the sacrifice of that which is most precious to us, He does not condone human sacrifice at our initiative. Second, Micah's imagery also reminds the Israelites of their pagan neighbors, who sacrificed children to false gods. This is abhorrent to the Lord (Leviticus 20:2; Jeremiah 7:31; 19:5; 32:35).

Micah leaves questions unanswered, but the expected response is clear. We cannot earn God's favor by our sacrifices, no matter how lavish they may be. Sacrifice can be empty or self-serving, and God does not desire such acts.

8. Who answered Micah's questions (v. 8)?

Here Micah then answered his own questions. God does not desire ritualistic relationship; He wants one that grows out of a willing heart. Deuteronomy 10:12-13 explains it: "And now, Israel, what doth the Lord thy God require of thee, but to fear the Lord thy God, to walk in all his ways, and to love him, and to serve the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul, to keep the commandments of the Lord, and his statutes, which I command thee this day for thy good?"

When Micah said "O man" (Mic. 6:8), he was addressing every person, not just a particular individual. This was a universal application for everyone in Israel. God had established a covenant relationship with them; so all were to be included. Here God was emphasizing that when the heart is right and attitudes are in line with His will, the resulting actions will be godly. What is external does not determine what is in the heart; instead, what is in the heart determines actions.

9. What do the elements in His answer say about what God wants?

"The righteousness that God approves consists of three elements: a strict adherence to that which is equitable in all dealings with our fellowmen; a heart determined to do them good; and diligent care to live in close and intimate fellowship with God. When such righteousness is compared to the mere offering of sacrifices, how woefully lacking does the latter procedure appear" (Feinberg).

It is possible to live in a right relationship with both God and people. The order is important here, though, because until we are in a right relationship with God, we will find ourselves at odds with people. God requires that we be right with Him, right in our hearts, and right with those around us.

Conclusion - The Well Rounded Life

The well-rounded life is measured by all three of Micah's cardinal virtues: justice, mercy, and humility. These three form an interlocking grid, and the absence of one will yield a life without proper balance.

Studying Micah gives us an opportunity for self-evaluation. Do we seek justice and righteousness? Are there unrighteous elements in our lives with which we have become complacent? Do we really love being people of mercy? Have we become tired of kindness, "weary in well doing" (2 Thessalonians 3:13)? How would we evaluate our personal humility? Are we proud and boastful? Do we expect others to acknowledge our acts of service? Or are we content in knowing that we have done the right thing, whether or not we ever receive praise for it?

Prayer

God of mercy, God of justice, we come to You in humility. May You help us have victory over pride. May You help us be merciful, just as You have been merciful to us. May You help us long for righteousness and justice according to Your standards. We pray these things in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ, the righteous One, amen.

Thought to Remember: Practice God's requirements.

Anticipating Next Week's Lesson

Next week, we will learn how God announced His justice through the prophet Zephaniah. Study Zephaniah 3:1-5, 8-9.

Lesson Summarized By: Montario Fletcher

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