



Micah - Chapter Six

Summary of Chapter Six

Micah calls upon the Lord to make his case against his publicly before all of creation. This was the God that had brought them out of Egypt and stopped them being cursed by Balaam. What had God ever done to deserve their apostasy? Can the people put it right with offerings? No! All God requires is for them to be just, loving and humble.

The condemnation of the people is strong for they are cheats in business, liars and prone to violence. Because they have followed the ways of wicked kings rather than God they will become a desolate nation. God will judge the wicked.

IV Micah 6:1-7:20 - The Lord's Indictment and Restoration of His People

The Lord's indictment is delivered (6:1-8), and the crisis within the covenantal relationship is described (6:9-7:7). Micah expresses trust that the Lord will bring vindication (7:8-13), and he declares that the Lord will shepherd his flock with compassion (7:14-20).

IV.a Micah 6:1-8 - Israel accused: covenant violation

In this 'covenant lawsuit,' Micah calls creation as a witness (vv.1-2), and the Lord interrogates his people and provides them an opportunity to respond (v.3), recounts his past faithfulness to them (vv.4-5), and establishes the demands of covenantal obedience (vv.6-8).

IV.a.i Micah 6:1-5 - God Challenges Israel

The God who faithfully led the Israelites out of Egyptian slavery and protected them in the wilderness calls upon his people with a challenge. What has he done that has caused them to turn away from him?

IV.a.i.1 Micah 6:1-2 - The Prophetic Summons

Micah summons the participants, i.e. Israel, the created order, and Yahweh to the trial for the people have a case to answer.

- 1 Hear what the Lord says:
Rise, plead your case before the mountains,
and let the hills hear your voice.
- 2 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

Hear This verb, also translated as listen, marks the beginning of major divisions in Micah 1:2, 3:1 and here.

Plead your case, the controversy of the Lord. Case and controversy or indictment translate the Hebrew word *rib*, which suggests a legal procedure: <<**Set forth your case, says the Lord; bring your proofs, says the King of Jacob**>> (Isaiah 41:21), <<**Therefore once more I accuse you, says the Lord, and I accuse your children's children**>> (Jeremiah 2:9), and: <<**I must bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against him, until he takes my side and executes judgement for me. He will bring me out to the light; I shall see his vindication**>> (Micah 7:9). The prophet invites the Lord to set forth his case against his people before the created cosmos, i.e. the mountains and the foundations of the earth, which he does in vv.3-5.

IV.a.i.2 Micah 6:3-5 - Divine Interrogation and Saving Acts

Two questions from the Lord are followed by examples of his saving acts.

- 3 'O my people, what have I done to you?
In what have I wearied you? Answer me!

Micah 6:3

O my people. The Lord reminds Israel of its covenantal relationship with him. The two questions assume that the Israelites believe the Lord has wronged them.

Answer me! This challenges the Israelites to substantiate their complaints. As Israel steps up to the witness stand, God asks them what have I done to you? He

has done nothing but good to Israel, and has been repaid with rejection and rebellion: <<*Thus says the Lord: What wrong did your ancestors find in me that they went far from me, and went after worthless things, and became worthless themselves?*>> (Jeremiah 2:5).

⁴ 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.

Micah 6:4

I brought you up, and redeemed you, I sent before you. The Lord directed the events surrounding the exodus: <<*Hear this word that the Lord has spoken against you, O people of Israel, against the whole family that I brought up out of the land of Egypt: You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities*>> (Amos 3:1-2). Not only did God not do evil to Israel, he also did them an enormous amount of good. He redeemed them and gave them godly leaders. God's case against Israel looks pretty good.

I sent before you Moses, Aaron, and Miriam. Moses, with his brother and sister, led the people out of Egypt and throughout most of their wilderness wanderings.

⁵ O my people, remember now what King Balak of Moab devised,
what Balaam son of Beor answered him,
and what happened from Shittim to Gilgal,
that you may know the saving acts of the Lord.'

Micah 6:5

The mention of Balak and Balaam, the account of whom is told in Numbers Chapters 22-24, reminds the Israelites that the Lord longs to bless rather than curse them. Indeed, it was only by the Lord's command that they were not cursed.

After meeting with King Balak of Moab, Balaam prophesied over Israel four times. As he spoke forth God's Word, he did not curse Israel, but he blessed them each time instead. When he was unsuccessful in cursing Israel, Balaam answered Balak as to how Israel could be brought under a curse. Instead of trying to have a prophet curse them, the Moabites lead them into fornication and idolatry, and God will curse them. Balak did just that, sending his young women into the camp of Israel to lead Israel into sexual immorality and idolatry. Because of their sin, God did curse Israel, he brought a plague of

judgement upon Israel that killed 24,000. In light of this, Israel must remember that God could never be persuaded to curse Israel, except if they brought curses on themselves through their own disobedience and rebellion. Like a great lawyer in court, God shows Israel that if they feel cursed in any way, it is entirely their responsibility.

Remember that you may know. The faith of God's people is strengthened in the present by recounting his covenant-keeping deliverances of the past. The people of Israel crossed the Jordan from Shittim to Gilgal on the final portion of their journey; refer to Joshua Chapters 2-4. At Shittim the covenant was broken (Numbers 25:1-9), and at Gilgal it was renewed (Joshua Chapter 5).

IV.a.ii Micah 6:6-8 - What God Requires

These words are the direct response to the divine address in vv.3-5. These verses are composed of questions (vv.6-7) and a reply (v.8).

- 6 '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?
- 7 Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams,
with tens of thousands of rivers of oil?
Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression,
the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?'

Micah 6:6-7

With what shall I come before the Lord? This is the question for all people in every age. Here, though, it is a question asked out of bitterness and resentment. Israel calls out to God from the witness stand, and says: "Just what do you want from me? Just how much am I expected to give?"

Lord God on high. The covenantal Lord is also the transcendent God.

Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? The values of the sacrifices escalate in an attempt to discern the price for entering God's presence. The way in which the proposals increase in absurdity, ending with an outrage, i.e. tens of thousands of rivers of oil, and my firstborn, shows that Micah is exposing an attitude that wrongly sees sacrifice as an entry fee, rather than as an avenue for God to administer grace and forgiveness to the penitent, who will then express their thanks as v.8 describes.

The prophets often seem to dismiss sacrificial worship, but careful attention to the context shows that they are concerned with faithful use of the divine ordinances and obedience from the heart. Hosea 6:6, Amos 4:4-5, and 5:21-25 are addressed to the northern kingdom, in which the worship practices blatantly defy the Mosaic prescriptions with golden calves, sanctuaries other than the one in Jerusalem, and priests who were not Levites; refer also to 1 Kings 12:26-33. Texts such as Isaiah 1:11-17, Jeremiah 6:20 and 7:21-23, and Micah 6:6-8 here are addressed to Judah, where the external form of the sacrifices may be proper, but is not combined with genuine repentance and godly living. In such cases the worship is worse than empty; it is an attempt to manipulate God.

⁸ 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?

Micah 6:8

He has told you, O mortal, what is good. The Lord desires the primary forms of love – justice (to do justice), mercy (to love kindness), and faithfulness (to walk humbly) – as the expressed response of his people to his redemptive acts: <<So now, O Israel, what does the Lord your God require of you? Only to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the commandments of the Lord your God and his decrees that I am commanding you today, for your own well-being>> (Deuteronomy 10:12-13), <<And Samuel said, ‘Has the Lord as great delight in burnt-offerings and sacrifices, as in obedience to the voice of the Lord? Surely, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams>> (1 Samuel 15:22), <<What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices? says the Lord; I have had enough of burnt-offerings of rams and the fat of fed beasts; I do not delight in the blood of bulls, or of lambs, or of goats. When you come to appear before me, who asked this from your hand? Trample my courts no more; bringing offerings is futile; incense is an abomination to me. New moon and sabbath and calling of convocation – I cannot endure solemn assemblies with iniquity. Your new moons and your appointed festivals my soul hates; they have become a burden to me, I am weary of bearing them. When you stretch out your hands, I will hide my eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not listen; your hands are full of blood. Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your doings from before my eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow>> (Isaiah 1:11-17), <<For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than

burnt-offerings>> (Hosea 6:6), <<Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint, dill, and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. It is these you ought to have practised without neglecting the others>> (Matthew 23:23), and: <<To love him with all your heart, with all your understanding and with all your strength, and to love your neighbour as yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices>> (Mark 12:33 NIV). The Lord answers the contentious witness in open court. “What I require of you is not complicated. Simply do these three things.”

To do justice is to act in a just, fair way towards others. The saying is, ‘treat them the way you want to be treated.’

Justice, Hebrew *mishpat*, is much more than legal equity; it refers to the entire scope of God’s government of his world. Thus, to ‘do justice’ involves, on the part of government, a fair and just use of power and proper functioning of a fair judicial system, especially to protect the weak from the strong. On the part of individuals, justice involves honest and fair business dealings and faithfulness to keep one’s word, as well as not taking advantage of the poor or those with less power or protection. In the Bible, justice means fulfilling mutual obligations in a manner consistent with God’s moral law. Biblical justice creates the perfect human society.

To love kindness is to love mercy. God says, “Do not just show mercy, but love to show it. Give others the same measure of mercy you want to receive from me.”

To walk humbly. God is saying, “Remember who I am - your God. If you keep that in mind, you will walk humbly before me.”

Charles Spurgeon’s sermon ‘Micah’s Message for Today’ applied the idea of how <<*to walk humbly with your God*>>:

- Walk humbly when you are spiritually strong.
- Walk humbly when you have much work to do.
- Walk humbly in all your motives.
- Walk humbly studying God’s Word.
- Walk humbly when under trials.
- Walk humbly in your devotions.
- Walk humbly between you and your brothers in Christ.
- Walk humbly when dealing with sinners.

Your God is the complement to ‘my people’ in v.3 and v.5.

IV.b Micah 6:9-7:7 - Crisis in Relationship

The Lord's lawsuit continues with the city and its people indicted for specific crimes (6:9-12). The divine sentence is delivered (6:13-16), and the consequences are envisioned (7:1-6).

IV.b.i Micah 6:9-16 - Cheating and Violence to Be Punished

God has proven his case before the court. Israel is afflicted, but it is not because of the neglect or disregard of God. Their own sin brought their affliction upon them. In addition, what God required of them was not mysterious or too difficult; they simply did not do it. Now there is a price to be paid.

IV.b.i.1 Micah 6:9-12 - Divine Indictment of Treachery

After an introductory statement, direct charges of injustice, violence, and deception are levelled against the city and its people.

- ⁹ The voice of the Lord cries to the city
(it is sound wisdom to fear your name):
Hear, O tribe and assembly of the city!

Micah 6:9

The city is probably Jerusalem and its inhabitants, i.e. O tribe and assembly of the city, who should be the paradigm of godliness for the world.

- ¹⁰ Can I forget the treasures of wickedness in the house of the wicked,
and the scant measure that is accursed?
- ¹¹ Can I tolerate wicked scales
and a bag of dishonest weights?

Micah 6:10-11

The treasures of wickedness, wicked scales. The difficult Hebrew of v.10a is clarified by the parallel in v.11: the Lord cannot tolerate his people's gaining wealth by unjust business practices: <<***A false balance is an abomination to the Lord, but an accurate weight is his delight***>> (Proverbs 11:1), <<***Honest balances and scales are the Lord's; all the weights in the bag are his work***>> (Proverbs 16:11), <<***Diverse weights and diverse measures are both alike an abomination to the Lord***>> (Proverbs 20:10), and: <<***Hear this, you that trample on the needy, and bring to ruin the poor of the land, saying, 'When will the new moon be over so that we may sell grain; and the sabbath, so that***>>

we may offer wheat for sale? We will make the ephah small and the shekel great, and practise deceit with false balances, buying the poor for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals, and selling the sweepings of the wheat>> (Amos 8:4-6).

¹² Your wealthy are full of violence;
your inhabitants speak lies,
with tongues of deceit in their mouths.

Micah 6:12

Your wealthy are full of violence. The sin of Israel went further than just cheating others in business and commerce; they also made themselves rich through violence and intimidation. They could expect the judgement of God for such sin.

With tongues of deceit in their mouths. Deceptive speech corresponds naturally with deceptive scales (v.11). The tongue can be a destructive force: <<*For your iniquity teaches your mouth, and you choose the tongue of the crafty*>> (Job 15:5), <<*For there is no truth in their mouths; their hearts are destruction; their throats are open graves; they flatter with their tongues*>> (Psalm 5:9), <<*Their mouths are filled with cursing and deceit and oppression; under their tongues are mischief and iniquity*>> (Psalm 10:7), <<*Deacons likewise must be serious, not double-tongued, not indulging in much wine, not greedy for money*>> (1 Timothy 3:8), <<*And the tongue is a fire. The tongue is placed among our members as a world of iniquity; it stains the whole body, sets on fire the cycle of nature, and is itself set on fire by hell*>> (James 3:6).

IV.b.i.2 Micah 6:13-16 - Divine Sentence for Treachery

A summary judgement (v.13) is followed by examples of covenant curses (vv.14-15) and then a fitting concluding statement of the Lord's case (v.16).

¹³ Therefore I have begun to strike you down,
making you desolate because of your sins.

Micah 6:13

Therefore I have begun to strike you down, making you desolate because of your sins. The Lord himself delivers the sentence: <<*Then I said, 'How long, O Lord?' And he said: 'Until cities lie waste without inhabitant, and houses without people, and the land is utterly desolate; until the Lord sends everyone far away, and vast is the emptiness in the midst of the land*>> (Isaiah 6:11-12). This general statement of judgement connects the previously discussed wickedness (vv.10-12) with the specific sentence that follows (vv.14-15).

- 14 You shall eat, but not be satisfied,
and there shall be a gnawing hunger within you;
you shall put away, but not save,
and what you save, I will hand over to the sword.
- 15 You shall sow, but not reap;
you shall tread olives, but not anoint yourselves with oil;
you shall tread grapes, but not drink wine.

Micah 6:14-15

You shall eat, but not be satisfied, and what you save, I will hand over to the sword. God promises a tragic end for their ill-gotten gains. He will allow them no satisfaction or blessing in what they possess.

You shall sow, but not reap. These illustrative covenant curses, focusing attention throughout with the personal pronoun you, emphasise the ultimate futility of the people's activities: <<*You shall become engaged to a woman, but another man shall lie with her. You shall build a house, but not live in it. You shall plant a vineyard, but not enjoy its fruit. Your ox shall be butchered before your eyes, but you shall not eat of it. Your donkey shall be stolen in front of you, and shall not be restored to you. Your sheep shall be given to your enemies, without anyone to help you*>> (Deuteronomy 28:30-31), <<*Therefore, because you trample on the poor and take from them levies of grain, you have built houses of hewn stone, but you shall not live in them; you have planted pleasant vineyards, but you shall not drink their wine*>> (Amos 5:11), <<*Their wealth shall be plundered, and their houses laid waste. Though they build houses, they shall not inhabit them; though they plant vineyards, they shall not drink wine from them*>> (Zephaniah 1:13), and: <<*You have sown much, and harvested little; you eat, but you never have enough; you drink, but you never have your fill; you clothe yourselves, but no one is warm; and you that earn wages earn wages to put them into a bag with holes*>> (Haggai 1:6). God controls their weather and their crops; therefore, the people's turning from God brings severe economic consequences.

You shall tread olives, but not anoint yourselves with oil. Olive oil was a key component in the lives of Israelites, both in the preparation of food and for religious anointing. They will grow their crops, press the olives but will not produce the required and much needed oil.

Olive presses from as early as the 8th-7th Centuries BC have been discovered at the sites of Gezer, Tell Beit Mirsim, Beth-shemesh, and Tell Dan. Normal operation is that an upper stone is rolled over olives in the depression of a

lower stone; the weight of the upper stone squeezes out the oil, which is then saved in a vat.

¹⁶ For you have kept the statutes of Omri
and all the works of the house of Ahab,
and you have followed their counsels.

Therefore I will make you a desolation, and your inhabitants an
object of hissing;

so you shall bear the scorn of my people.

Micah 6:16

Omri and Ahab are mentioned only here in all the Minor Prophets. Micah refers to the corrupting influence of these northern kings on the southern kingdom of Judah; refer to 1 Kings 16:25-33.

You have followed in their counsels. Instead of walking in the ways of the Lord, they walked in the sinful example of wicked kings before them, and in the counsels of the ungodly. Replacing the true counsellor with the counsels of these wicked human kings led to desolation, hissing, and scorn: the city becomes like its inhabitants, disparaged and belittled: <<*Now why do you cry aloud? Is there no king in you? Has your counsellor perished, that pangs have seized you like a woman in labour?*>> (Micah 4:9).

There is symbolism here with the way Jesus was greeted on the Cross: <<*Those who passed by derided him, shaking their heads and saying, 'Aha! You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself, and come down from the cross!' In the same way the chief priests, along with the scribes, were also mocking him among themselves and saying, 'He saved others; he cannot save himself. Let the Messiah, the King of Israel, come down from the cross now, so that we may see and believe.'* Those who were crucified with him also taunted him>> (Mark 15:29-32).

The scorn of my people. Condemnation may follow yet hope remains because they still bear the title of my people.