A STUDY OF THE PROPHET MICAH

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Micah 1:1-7
THE CRUSADER JUDGE

Synopsis: In this brief introduction, Yahweh brings a lawsuit against all of humanity. The lawsuit is based on the sins of Yahweh’s people in particular. Yahweh’s measured, patient, and just anger eventually becomes as hot as molten lava. He will destroy Samaria: the root of the problem.

JUDAH (v.1)

Judah refers to the southern half of Yahweh’s people (LORD = Yahweh, God’s Name as revealed to Moses). The children of Abraham were delivered from Egypt, brought into the Promised Land, and given a King. Their second king was named David. He was promised an everlasting dynasty that would spread Peace across the entire world: the Kingdom of God.

But David’s son Solomon ended up being a horrible king and his grandson, Rehoboam, was so bad that a civil war ensued. The large northern half of the Kingdom revolted, broke away, and became Israel. Israel’s capital was Samaria. What started as a righteous revolution quickly deteriorated into spiritual anarchy. And by Micah’s day, Israel was a hothouse of idolatry, arrogance, and economic oppression centered in Samaria.

The small southern portion was henceforth called Judah. Jerusalem was the capital of the Judah. She wasn’t much better than Samaria. But the Lord’s promises to her remained in force. The Presence of the Kingdom would remain within her: Yahweh’s Royal Presence in the Temple, the focal point of Jerusalem. And so she is the focus of Micah’s prophecy.

THE 8TH CENTURY (v.1)

Micah was from Moresheth - a small village in the fertile Shephelah hills which were just southwest of Jerusalem. He was a prophet of the Southern Kingdom. He likely moved to Jerusalem and spent most of his ‘professional’ life there.

Micah’s prophecies probably occurred sometime between 730-710BC. These dates fall within the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah. They were kings of Judah, the Southern Kingdom. The Northern Kingdom had become fantastically wealthy at this time and Samaria was a world class city. Judah was following in her footsteps. As wealth grew, economic inequality abounded. As economic inequities grew, economic oppression flourished. Covetousness and greed overwhelmed Judah’s dwindling interest in obeying Yahweh’s Law.
The 8th Century also witnessed the explosion of a massive world Empire: Assyria. Assyria rivaled and then eclipsed Egypt as the dominant power of the Mid-East. She was to be followed by the Babylonian Empire who was herself followed by the Persian Empire, and so on (Medes, Greeks, Romans, etc). Daniel has a vision of single statue representing all of these Empires. This solitary entity might be described simply as the Empire; Assyria was merely the 8th century version of an ageless reality. The Empire has always opposed the Kingdom of God and always will.

THE VISION (v.1)

Notice, the word of Yahweh came to Micah. Literally, the text says, “the word happened to Micah.” The end of v.1 says, “he saw” this “word.” The “word” of Yahweh is His revelation given to Moses: the first five books of the Bible known as the Pentateuch (from the Hebrew word “five”). So, v.1 is describing something that is (1) an event, (2) visual, and (3) based in the Pentateuch. The prophets of God were mystics who had visions of reality that penetrated beneath surface appearances.

Though these word-dreams happened to Micah, they got organized later into a thoughtful, structured book; there are three cycles (Ch.1-2, Ch. 3-5, Ch. 6-7). Each has the same pattern of sin, punishment, hope. Micah probably spent years putting it all together. And then a later editor (Nehemiah, Ezra?) may have written v.1 as he was putting together the Book of the Twelve (the last 12 books of the old testament which are sometimes called the Minor Prophets).

Sometimes biblical prophecy is confused with personal intuition; vague predictions about the future like palm reading. What makes Micah’s word-based visionary experience different from palm reading? How should we apply this today? In what ways is his case unique and in what ways should we expect it as part of our church’s experience?

COVENANT LAWSUIT (v.2)

“Hear” occurs at the beginning of all three cycles of the Prophecy (1:2, 3:1, 5:1). It's a strong word that is meant to rouse slumbering lawbreakers like a summons to court. The verb “be a witness” is a legal term used by almost all the prophets (“riv” in Hebrew). It also occurs in Micah 6.1. Micah is bringing a lawsuit against Israel. The prophets were prosecutors of the Covenant that Yahweh made with Israel on Mt. Sinai. The Covenant eternally bound Israel to Yahweh. Yahweh snatched Abraham out of idolatry, promised that a great nation would come from him, rescued his children out of Egypt, and gave Israel the promised Land. Yahweh made demands on Israel; the heart of these demands are summed up in the Law, the 10 Commandments. When Israel broke the Commandments, God sent the prophets. The prophets were like Elliot Ness prosecuting Al Capone. The prophet Nathan approached a guilty King David, pointed
his finger at him and said, “You are the criminal here!” That’s what Micah is doing in this prophecy. **Who functions in your life as a prophet? Do you ever function as a prophet to anyone else?** If you are a Christian, what Covenant would appeal to if you were talking to a fellow Christian engaged in adultery? What if you were talking to a non-Christian?

**INTERNATIONAL LAWSUIT (v.2)**

Notice that Micah is suing the whole world: “you peoples, all of you.” Yahweh is bringing firsthand, eyewitness testimony against everyone on the planet. In one sense, Yahweh is in Covenant with every human being simply because he made them and the Law is written on their hearts (Romans 2:14). So, the whole earth is in the dock. He is coming against all injustice: injustice itself. However, later (v.5) he says, “all this is for the transgression of Jacob and for the sins of the house of Israel.” So, although Yahweh is suing Israel in particular, all the nations are implicated because Israel represents humanity: as Israel goes, so go the nations. If even Israel was breaking the explicit Covenant, how much more were the nations breaking the implicit covenant. Israel was supposed to bless every nation (Gen. 12:2) but instead she is causing them to be sued.

In ‘Bad Religion’ Ross Douthat claims that even secular Americans should be concerned when there is heresy in the church, because if the church is breaking their covenant with God then the whole culture around the church will be adversely effected. **How is this like the situation in Micah 1:2?** (Note the contrast in Micah 4:2. One day, the terrible situation of Micah 2:2 will be reversed. Israel will enable the nations to keep the Law.)

**MELTING MOUNTAINS (vv.3-4)**

Besides being an objective, disinterested, dispassionate judge (v.2), Yahweh is also a passionate crusader. He *administers* justice. He *executes* justice. The mountain-melting heat of Yahweh points to a Creator who loves justice furiously. Imagine the strongest, most permanent structures on this earth (in Micah’s day all the strongest fortresses were built upon mountains) melting like wax? Have you seen how quickly heated wax loses it’s shape and structure? His moral fire is so hot that the most stable forms in life are threatened.

Consider times in your life where you began to feel Yahweh’s moral heat. **How do you react to people who express righteous indignation?** Think of your reaction to modern prophets like Micah. **List some people who you think are modern prophets** (though they may not be Christians, expressing righteous indignation without appealing to any Law is intellectually inconsistent).
DECONSTRUCTION OF SAMARIA (vv.6-7)

Notice that Yahweh’s first target is Samaria (not Jerusalem). He points his finger at all the nations, then shifts to Samaria, glances over at the Shephelah (see next study) and finally lands at Jerusalem in Chapter 2 (and the rest of the book). He probably starts with Samaria because that is the source of the injustice; an injustice that bubbles up out of the deep spring of idolatry. Notice all the vocabulary for idolatry in vv.5-7. Write a few of them down. Think about the link between idolatry and injustice.

Notice also that the punishment of Samaria fits the crime. There seems to be a systematic deconstruction of Samaria. Her pride of invincibility (she was built on a very seemingly impregnable rock) is ripped away. She is taken down to the studs physically (v.6) and spiritually (v.7). What do you think “wages” and “the fee of a prostitute” mean (v.7)? What does idolatry have to do with sexual unfaithfulness? (see James 4:4). When has God spiritually deconstructed your idols?
Synopsis: Micah’s heart resonates with Yahweh’s breaking heart. Micah laments the incurable wound that has spread from Samaria to Judah; even into his homeland, the Shephelah. He laments both the sin and the ensuing destruction.

PROPHETIC RESONANCE (v.8)

Beginning in v.8, Micah is lamenting and wailing, literally “howling” and “beating his breast.” He is stripping himself and walking around naked. He is throwing what Kathy Keller terms a “Godly tantrum.” It’s not a sudden, selfish loss of control in the midst of high emotion, like a child’s tantrum. Instead it is sincere emotion expressed in a planned, controlled way. Yahweh’s prophets throw godly tantrums so that the apathetic will attend to what they are saying. Micah needs for the Israelites to listen; he is trying to be heard.

Micah’s heart is not cold but tender. “As he hears the word of God, he feels with the heart of God” (Prior). The false prophets, in comparison, were not in agony. That is the mark of a true prophet of Yahweh: resonance with the heart of God. Micah is personally identifying with his people and their suffering. He is standing with his people, in the midst of his people. His judgments are neither lofty nor distant. Remember Micah is from Judah. But notice that he is lamenting not just for Jerusalem, the capital of Judah, but also for Samaria, the capital of Northern Israel. These people, the Samaritans, are not his people. The people in Judah did not look upon the Samaritans with favor. Yet Micah is not glad for Samaria’s destruction but weeps sincerely. Again, he is not feeling as a typical man would feel; he is resonating with God’s own grief. As ambassadors of Yahweh, we ought also weep.

Think about the unbelievers you know. Think about the believers you know who are making unwise decisions that are blatantly against God’s law and are then justifying those decisions. What is your attitude toward their sin? What do you feel toward these people? Do you feel self-righteous and superior, even just a little bit? Do you sincerely grieve over their sin and identify with them?

UBIQUITOUS JUDGMENT (v.8)

The fact is that God’s judgment is falling on everyone in Samaria and Jerusalem, including Micah himself. No one will escape untouched. God’s judgment will affect those who are perpetrating the evil and those who are not.

Micah compares his mourning to that of jackals and ostriches. In the bible, the jackal is frequently used as a literary device to illustrate desolation, loneliness, and abandonment. The jackal has a habit of living in the ruins of former cities and other
areas abandoned by humans. Micah just described Samaria becoming “a heap in the open country” (1:6). The comparison makes sense. The ostrich is a nomadic bird that lives in the open plain, often in deserts. Like the jackal, ostriches are often spotted alone. Micah is emphasizing the dramatic leap from the hustle and bustle of urban wealth to the solitude of utter wilderness; from fortressed city walls to wasteland. This was unimaginable for a stronghold as indomitable as Samaria. Jackals and ostriches also have a habit of howling. Micah is likewise bellowing for these people.

THE SPREAD WOUND (vv.9-13)

In v.9 the disease begins to spread. Samaria’s “wound is incurable; and it has come to Judah, it has reached to the gate of my people, to Jerusalem.” The horror of breaking God’s covenant as a nation has spread from Samaria to the regions around Judah called the Shephelah, and eventually to the capital of Judah. Consequently, God’s judgment—the onslaught of Assyria’s crushing army—spreads as well.

Assyria is marching from Samaria to the Shephelah, a hill country dotted with fortified cities and located about 21 miles southwest of Jerusalem. The Shephelah consisted of the satellite cities of Jerusalem. So if Winston-Salem were Jerusalem, the Shephelah would be Kernersville, Arcadia, Welcome, Lexington, Davidson County, Advance, and High Point.

Samaria fell to the Assyrian king, Sargon II, between 722-705 BC. Twenty-one years later (701) the subsequent Assyrian king, Sennacherib, attacked Judah and captured 46 towns and cities around Jerusalem. Some of these towns were in the Shephelah. Jerusalem herself did not fall until 586.

Micah’s hometown was Moresheth-gath. The eight other towns mentioned in 1:10-16 surround Moresheth-gath in a circle with a nine-mile radius. It’s like Micah is standing on a hill in his hometown, slowly spinning 360 degrees, and lamenting over each town he sees.

PROPHETIC PUNS (vv.10-15)

Micah uses Hebrew wordplay in the prophetic message for each town. “For some towns he uses a pun, for others a play on the sound of the town’s name, for yet others he draws out the meaning implicit in the name as such” (Craigie, from Prior). In our case, we might say, “Kernersville will be reduced to a mere kernel. Arcadia will be barricaded. Cry ‘farewell’ to Welcome. Lexington will be X-ed out. Davidson County will be cut off from the line of David. Advance will be forced to retreat. High Point will be brought low.” We, like Micah, are intimate with the land and people in these places. It’s chilling to think of our own hill country as being destroyed by the hand of God. Why do you think Micah employs these clever puns?
The messages to the nine towns, which are again some type of word play, are as follows:

Bethleaphrah=”house of dust”: roll yourselves in the dust *(which was a form of mourning)*.
Shaphir=”beauty town”: pass on your way in nakedness and shame.
Zaanan=”go forth”: do not come forth.
Bethzel=”house of the taking away”: its wailing shall take away from you its standing place.
Maroth=”bitter town”: wait anxiously for “sweetness” (good). Notice that “evil has come down form the Lord” in v.12. Assyria is His tool, but the calamity is directly and purposefully from His hand. Maroth eagerly waits for good but receives evil.
Moresheth-gath=”possession”: you shall give parting gifts, like a family paying their daughter’s dowry as she leaves them to marry. In this case, the people are departing into exile.
Achzib=”deception town”: you shall be a deceitful thing.
Mareshah=”conqueror”: I will again bring a conqueror upon you.

**LACHISH (v.13)**

Lachish was a military stronghold. The words “Lachish” and “steeds” sound similar in Hebrew. *Micah is blaming Lachish for being the seeds of Judah’s disaster, as Lachish would have thrown her weight on the might of her military and not on God’s character. Trouble always comes to us when we put our security in anything other than God Himself. He pursues us to teach us that there is no other way; the only way is dependence on Him. That is the whole lesson of the entire bible. Here He is pursuing His people, His bride.*

Give this some thought. **On what do you depend for your peace of mind, for your security, for safety, in order to reduce your fear?** Life can be full of joy, but it can also be very, very scary and devastating. Imagine one of your worst case scenarios, one of the things you fear more than anything. **What if this scenario occurred? Could you believe that God was ordaining those circumstances and was in control? Do you think you could find peace in God alone?**

**GATH & ADULLAM (v.10, v.15)**

Gath: The first and last names mentioned, Gath and Adullam, stand out from the pack. They may have been part of the Shephelah towns (commentators disagree) but are definitely references to two of the lowest points in King David’s life. “Gath” sounds like the Hebrew word for “tell.” But it also refers to King David’s song of lament upon learning of the deaths of Saul and Saul’s son, Jonathan, in the battle at Mount Gilboa. 2 Samuel 1:20: “Tell it not in Gath, publish it not in the streets of Ashkelon; lest the daughters of the Philistines rejoice, lest the daughters of the uncircumcised exult.”
David did not want the Philistines to gloat in their victory over Israel, and Gath was the Philistine stronghold. After all, if Israel is the light to the nations, then no nation should be glad at her light dimming. Today’s culture as well should never rejoice in the hardships the church undergoes, because ultimately trouble for God’s people means trouble for the world.

**Adullam**: The cave of Adullam was where David fled when he was being pursued by King Saul in 1 Samuel 22. There he became captain of a band of about 400 down-and-out men, “everyone who was in distress, and everyone who was in debt, and everyone who was discontented” (1 Samuel 22:2). Not the type of men one would hope to command. Micah says that “the glory of Israel shall come to Adullam” (1:15). That is, the nobles and wealthy men and leaders of Jerusalem (“the glory of Israel”) will be brought to the point of hiding in a cave to save their lives. Unthinkable. But there is also an element of hope here. This band of hopeless men followed David and helped him eventually to become king. God carried them from the depths and darkness of that cave to the victorious heights of Zion. And later in Micah, God promises that a remnant will be preserved from the coming destruction, and the remnant in 4:6-7 is described as “the lame...those who have been driven away...those whom I have afflicted...those who were cast off.” Not unlike the sad, needy, restless group at Adullam.

**BALDNESS (v.16)**

The first chapter of Micah ends with an image of baldness. “Make yourselves bald and cut off your hair, for the children of your delight” (1:16). “Children of your delight” is literally “sons of your pamperings.” The leaders had cushioned themselves with wealth and indulgences obtained through injustices and now were about to be captured and taken into exile. Yikes! Baldness was a severe form of shame. Kings let their hair and beards grow long. And when someone was in mourning, they would allow their hair to be disheveled. But never would one want to cut off their hair. That is extreme, and this leveling by the Assyrians was to be extreme as well.

Again, Micah felt with God’s own heart. He resonated with God’s grief for His disobedient people while at the same time speaking harsh truth to them. We tend to either fall on one side or the other: speaking harsh truth that makes the person angry and closed off to what we are saying OR listening to the person with gentleness and grace and not speaking directly enough to correct their false beliefs or disobedient actions. **Have you ever been called to repentance through the words or actions of someone specific in your life? Was there truth? Were there tears? What would it look like for us to do that for others in our lives?**
Micah 2
THE SINS OF JERUSALEM

Synopsis: In Micah 2 we see a microcosm of the whole book. It starts with an expose of economic oppression that is legitimized by the leaders of Israel. Then we see Yahweh’s punishment for this sin. The chapter ends with a short, shocking stab of hope, amidst despair.

THE LAND GRABBERS (vv.1-2)

Judah has become wealthy on the coattails of Samaria. Economic prosperity has led to an increasing disparity between the rich and the poor. Now, the upper crust of Jerusalem are up late at night coveting the possessions of the poor, especially their land and houses. The real estate market is booming in Jerusalem, 722 BC. To some extent, this is the result of the corrupting influence of the wealthy and powerful Empire (i.e. Assyria).

Notice the link between “they covet” and “they oppress” (v.2). In 1 Kings 21 King Ahab (a King of Israel, the Northern Kingdom) sees a beautiful vineyard belonging to a man named Naboth. Naboth won’t give it to him because, as Naboth says, “God forbid that I should give you the inheritance of my fathers” (1 Kings 21:3). Ahab is “vexed and sullen” that night. He craves Naboth’s vineyard and will do anything to get it. Eventually, Ahab’s sense of his own power combined with his obsessive longing for Naboth’s vineyard leads him to violently steal the vineyard. The same thing is going on in Micah 2:1. These wealthy land grabbers take what isn’t theirs partially “because it is in the power of their hand” to do so. **Today, in our prosperous land, how do you see the haves using their power to take from the have-nots?** It is likely that you have some form of power over most of the people who are making and selling the goods that you consume. **How could your covetousness be an indirect cause of their oppression?**

Note: There is a link between the sins of Micah 1 (idolatry) and Micah 2 (coveting and oppression). Coveting things is a form of idolatry. In Colossians 3:5 Paul makes a surprising connection between the first and last commandments. He talks about “covetousness which is idolatry.” Paul is saying, “Whatever you desire obsessively is functioning as your god” (things like “houses and lands”, your finger automatically pressing on the stock market “App”, your acquisitive tendencies: Zappos, Amazon, Wal-Mart).

ECONOMIC OPPRESSION (vv.8-9)

Verse 8 seems to confirm that land grabbing is more than a sin against other humans; it is rebellion against Yahweh. They are pitted squarely against their King: “lately my people have risen up as an enemy.” God’s people look less like the Kingdom than the Empire they’re supposed to be fighting.
We live in a culture, the church included, that generally turns a blind eye to economic injustice and human rights violations. If there happens to be any public moral declamation of injustice, it is generally conducted on the horizontal level: a crime against humanity. God's attitude towards land grabbing challenges our culture's reading of economic oppression: oppression is bigger than a human rights violation.

Some Christians respond to economic injustice at a macro-level: working for a certain political advocacy group (sojo.net) raising global awareness (fightpoverty.com). Others respond at the micro-level: establishing relationships with people who have very few material resources and helping them. Which approach do you tend towards? What are some of the strengths and weaknesses of your approach?

Note: The Kingdom will eventually defeat the Empire. Micah's x-ray moral vision (implied in v.1) is like Kingdom “Intelligence.” It penetrates into the midnight thought-life of the wealthy oppressors (implied in v.1). The land grabber’s challenge to Yahweh’s rule is exposed and therefore doomed.

THE VICTIMS (vv.8-9)

Note the three different types of victims of land grabbing (vv.8-9). They are listed in order of increasing vulnerability. The last group, the “young children” (v.9) are the most vulnerable. A “rich robe” and a “delightful house” are taken from them. Even Yahweh’s “splendor” is taken from them. What is Yahweh’s splendor? Possessing land (like a vineyard) was a huge part of a young Israelite’s identity and worth. Think back to Naboth. He was horrified that Ahab might take his vineyard because it was his family inheritance. It was part of God’s covenant with Abraham: I will give the promised land (a new garden like Eden) to you and your children. So, “Naboth’s inheritance” (1 Kings 21:3) was part of “Yahweh’s splendor” (Micah 2:9) because the vineyard was part of the New Eden: it was at the heart of Yahweh’s gift to Israel. Yahweh’s gift of land to Naboth (and to the “young children”) is a manifestation of his splendid generosity. Catholic scholars coined the phrase, “God's preferential option for the poor.” Throughout the Bible, Yahweh’s care for the poor is especially evident. Why are the poor a central part of the coming of God’s kingdom and the defeat of the Empire?

THE COVER UP (vv. 6-7,11)

The most powerful people in Judah were using their privilege for oppression. Foreseeing this possibility, God gave prophets. As we have already seen, the prophets were prosecutors of the covenant. They corrected the people when they started going off the rails. But what happens when the prophets themselves become part of the system of oppression? In a country of false prophets, there is nothing to stop the culture’s slide into idolatry and oppression. This is why God attacks false prophets in almost every book of the Bible. Notice the kind of things that the false prophets are saying about Micah in vv.6-7. “The Insider” is a movie based on the true story of the Big
Tobacco’s cover up of the carcinogenic effects of cigarettes. The movie chronicles the intimidation tactics employed by companies like RJR and Phillip Morris to suppress the ugly truth about tobacco. Think about the urge within all humans to silence accusation: to hit the snooze button on people that are making their life difficult.

Do you see false prophets in pulpits around the country? In what ways might the teachers within your own church (wittingly or unwittingly) be turning a blind eye to social sins? Two examples: (1) my agnostic friend was appalled that American preachers said almost nothing about the US invasion of Iraq; (2) Ross Douthat in “Bad Religion” says that the prosperity gospel is a cancer running through many churches in the world today. How does Micah’s sarcastic remark of v.11 support Douthat’s critique?

PUNISHMENT (vv.3-5, 10)

The second part of Micah’s threefold message is punishment. Because of the people’s sin, which includes their participation in the cover-up, the people will be punished. Remember, these are the children of Abraham. Spectacular promises have been made to them, especially regarding their Eden-like land. In v.3 Yahweh is handing down the sentence for their guilt: the land will be taken from them. The punishment fits the crime. In the New Living Translation, Micah 2:3 begins, “I will reward them evil for evil.” They “walked haughtily” (literally, “with neck outstretched”); he’s placing a noose upon them, “from which [they] cannot remove [their] necks.” Land grabbers will have their land grabbed from them. They had been stealing the splendor of the children of Abraham. Now their “portion” (v.4) and their “fields” (v.4) will be taken from them. “To cast the line” (v.5) is also a reference to setting boundaries for land. Starting in 701 BC, Judah (the Southern Kingdom) started to have her land taken from her. The Assyrian King Sennacherib first invaded the Northern Kingdom (Israel), capturing Samaria in 722 BC. Then he swept south into Judah. In a counterclockwise motion he devastated the villages of Judah and in 701 he was on the brink of capturing Jerusalem. This is her punishment.

Punishment gets a bad rap in Western countries today. We talk about discipline rather than punishment. Prisons are termed “rehabilitation centers.” Penal language is removed from the public lingo. Nevertheless, Yahweh—Israel’s gracious and loving Father—is “devising disaster (literally, “evil”)” for his people. This is premeditated punishment. The thesis of a recent book written by James Hamilton is that the central theme of the Bible is the glory of God in punishment and salvation. In other words, God’s just punishment represents one side of his glory. Yahweh’s punishments are slow to come and tempered by leniency. Nevertheless, they come. Do you ever see this kind of punishment being exercised by God in your life (or others around you)? In what sense do Christians experience this punishment? See Hebrews 12:5-8. In what sense are Christians free from this punishment? See Romans 8:1.
THE HOPE (vv.12-13)

The climax of every cycle in Micah’s prophecy is hope (look at the end of Chapter 2, 5, and 7). Verses 12-13 present to us a scene of sudden, divine deliverance. The siege equipment of Assyria has been erected around Jerusalem for a long, long time: catapults, ramps, battering rams, flaming arrows, large movable towers. The king (Hezekiah during the Assyrian assault) and his people are trapped like a bird in a cage. Assyria has taken down greater cities than Jerusalem (Samaria) by this excruciating method of conquest. The Empire looks like it will destroy The Kingdom. However, in v. 13, Yahweh himself (the LORD) enters the fray. He opens up a breach in the attacking army. As the sea of Assyrian soldiers parts, the army of Israel follows their King, breaks through, and passes out of the gates. As the Assyrians are running back home with their tails between their legs, Yahweh is gathering his remnant like a shepherd gathering his flock.

The word “remnant” is among the most important words in Micah’s prophecy. It will appear again in the other two major sections of hope: 4:7 and 7:18. Most of Yahweh’s people have given up on him, surrendered to Assyria, deserted the army, or died in despair. But there are some that have remained faithful: the remnant. The Kingdom of God will be maintained amidst the remnant.

A Christian living in 2012 can appropriate the hope of verses 12-13. How is the Kingdom today under siege by the Empire? The divine King, Jesus, has opened the breach for us. How does this passage give you hope about the future of the Church?

Micah’s hope is very surprising. He has castigated God’s people. His moral blitzkrieg intensifies in v.11 which is about a prophet of false hope. But then, without batting an eye, Micah gives us his own version of hope. The change from despair to hope is instantaneous, so much so that many great commentators (like John Calvin) think that vv.12-13 are a continuation of the oracle of doom. How is Micah’s hope different from the hope of the false prophets? Recently, my family was out to dinner with an old friend, Bailey Green, a seminary graduate who now works to ensure that arable land is not contaminated by pollution. Someone asked, “Bailey, how can you have any hope when you see so much ignorance and unconcern about environmental atrocities?” Bailey replied, “I’ve come to believe that you have to come right up to the edge of despair to have real hope.” Assuming Micah would agree with Bailey, how is this hope different from much of Christianity’s teaching about an afterlife?

If you were living in Harare, Zimbabwe today (recently rated the least livable city in the world) and someone was running around proclaiming a great and coming restoration, how would they be received? If you were living there, how would you react? Maybe you are living in a relational, emotional, or spiritual Harare now. Does Micah’s hope seem far fetched or naive to you?
Micah 3
UNGODLY LEADERSHIP

Synopsis: Micah 2 ends with, “Their king will pass on before them, Yahweh at their head.” Micah 3 begins, “Hear, you heads of Jacob and rulers of the house of Israel.” Micah is sharply contrasting God’s perfect headship with the foul leadership of Jerusalem, both secular and spiritual. He says that the key to Godly leadership is being “filled with...the Spirit of the Lord” (3:8).

CORRUPT JUDGES (v.1, 9-11a)

Micah first addresses the secular leaders of the day, both political and legal: kings, magistrates, judges. He asks a cutting question in v.1, “Is it not for you to know justice?” After all, God had clearly spelled out how to carry out justice in his Kingdom (Exodus 21-23 and Leviticus 17-20). He specifically addressed all kinds of situations and what to do in each case. He made special provisions to protect the weak and the poor. After a servant served for six years, he was to go free in the seventh year. If someone lent money to a poor man, he was not to exact interest from him. If someone cursed or struck his mother or father, he was to be put to death (hello!). Even the land was to have rest after being farmed for a time. God’s law demonstrates his very own character. He is full of compassion for the weak, the poor, and the sojourner. The leaders in Micah’s day were acting in reverse of the law. They were using their power to exploit the weak and perpetrate all kinds of wrongs. “It is very difficult for those in power politically to resist using that power for their own personal advantage” (Smith). These rulers were not resisting. It was their job to know justice, to know the rules and to know the Lawgiver himself. Instead, they knew him not. They were supposed to understand that justice was a good thing. Instead, they were hating the good and loving the evil (v. 1). These verbs, “hating” and “loving,” imply a continuous, ongoing action, not just a mistake. Consequently these judges and leaders ruled in hideously selfish ways that were destructive to the people. They were playing the part of the Empire rather than the Kingdom.

Skip to v. 9-11a, where Micah continues his message to the heads and rulers of Jerusalem. He says that they “detest justice and make crooked all that is straight.” In v. 11a, he says, “Its heads give judgment for a bribe.” Justice became a commodity. If you were poor, well, too bad; the verdict would not likely be in your favor. But if you had money to bribe the judge, you could commit any number of crimes with no consequences. Power was in the hands of those who accepted bribes and those who gave bribes. If you were honest or poor, it would not go well for you.

Assuming that the Empire is alive and well in America, how do these kinds of injustices play out in our midst? Are judges tempted to make a ruling based on their political party affiliation instead of the word of the law? Do people who are wealthy and powerful receive better legal aid in court cases (O.J. Simpson’s trial
for murder, Bill Clinton’s impeachment trial)? Think of examples. Are you personally culpable in such injustices as these?

CANNIBALS (vv.2-3)

These rulers were so vicious that Micah describes them as cannibals in vv.2-3. Like a butcher chopping up his carcass, these leaders tear off the skin of their people, break their bones in pieces, and throw their flesh into a boiling caldron. This imagery is graphic and disturbing, perhaps the most disturbing imagery in the entire book. The leaders were gobbling up the people. The rich were getting richer and fatter as the poor were losing their properties and their savings. Yahweh had declared that every human being was made in his image, inherently valuable and worthy. The leaders saw the people as expendable, stepping stones to more power and more wealth. The business practices in chapter 2 had spread to the decision-making powers of the rulers of the city. Instead of guiding and nurturing God’s sheep, the leaders were butchering the sheep. They were not giving the image of God in each person its due respect; they did not see the inherent dignity in each person. Think of the people in your life with whom it is the most difficult to get along, or people with whom it is difficult to be around. Do you ever think about them as being made in God’s image, after his likeness (Genesis 1:26)? Read James 3:9.

FALSE PROPHETS (vv.5-7)

The secular leadership of Jerusalem was corrupt, and the spiritual leadership was equally rancid. The incurable wound of Samaria had spread to Jerusalem, from business leaders (Micah 2) to political rulers (3:1-4), and then right down to the spiritual leaders (3:5-7).

We looked at the reprehensible behavior of the false prophets in Micah 2:11. In Micah 3:5 they are openly chastised. Micah calls them “the prophets who lead my people astray”—the very opposite of a prophet’s job description. As we said, their purpose was to bring God’s message to the people of Judah. They were supposed to be pointing out the sin of the people, not participating in it! But these prophets were out for selfish gain—like Gollum, the untrustworthy guide in the land of Mordor. Their message depended on what was in it for them. If an Israelite gave them a bribe (“when they have something to eat”), they would cry “Peace.” If an Israelite did not give them a bribe (“who puts nothing into their mouths”), they would speak of war. “What comes out of the mouth of these prophets depends on what has been put into it” (Wolff through Prior). These prophets were fueled by their stomachs more than their Creator.

Note: Speaking of “Peace” in vain was a slap in the face to God. Shalom is the Hebrew word for peace (Jerusalem is the city of Shalom). True shalom meant plentiful reconciliation: of man to the earth, man to man, and man to God. To obtain Shalom cost God his life. He sent his only Son (called the “Prince of Peace” in Isaiah 9:6) as an
expiation for our sin, “and through him (Christ) to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross” (Colossians 1:20). Biblically, the importance of peace cannot be overstated:

Ephesians 2:13-14: But now in Christ Jesus you who were once far off have been brought near in the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who has made us both one, and has broken down the dividing wall of hostility.

Isaiah 26:3: Thou dost keep him in perfect peace (literally “peace, peace”), whose mind is stayed on thee, because he trusts in thee.

2 Thessalonians 3:16: Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times in all ways.

Isaiah 48:22: “There is no peace,” says the Lord, “for the wicked.”

Romans 5:1: Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Note: Just as God did not answer the judges as they cried out to God in v.4, God also is silent toward these false prophets in v.7 (“for there is no answer from God”). Their punishment is “night,” “darkness,” “the sun shall go down,” and “the day shall be black over them” (v.6). They will receive confusion and shame.

EVIL PRIESTS (v.11)

The prophets were godless. The priests were similarly corrupt. In v. 11b, Micah says that Jerusalem’s “priests teach for hire, its prophets divine for money.” Priests were under a high calling: “to teach the people of Israel all the statutes which the Lord has spoken to them by Moses” (Leviticus 10:11). When two of Aaron’s sons, who were priests, offered unauthorized fire and incense before the Lord, the Lord devoured them with fire. Priests had fair warning not to trifle with the holy and all-powerful God. Yet, here they are hocking their teaching to the highest bidder. It’s reminiscent of Judges 17, in which a man named Micah (not the same one as the prophet) hires a young priest (for 10 pieces of silver and clothing and lodging) to be his very own priest so that the Lord would prosper him. Priests were supposed to be public servants, not personal therapists or good luck charms.

Pastors today, too, are tempted to soften or clip their sermons so as not to offend. They are tempted to tell their people what they want to hear. It takes courage and integrity to preach the message that God wants people to hear. It’s not always entirely pleasant to hear from God. Think of churches and religious institutions today that have replaced the true message from God’s word with softer, more palatable material. Give some modern-day examples of false preachers and evil priests and their messages.
THE POWER OF GOD’S SPIRIT (v.8)

Micah is a completely different kind of prophet. Why? He is filled with God’s spirit (v.8). Micah is empowered to preach justice, to call Israel to repent. The whole message of the Bible is the message of John the Baptist (the greatest prophet): you must be righteous, you aren’t righteous, you need a savior. Consider what Paul tells his timid young disciple, Timothy: “the Spirit that God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love, and self-discipline. So do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord or of me his prisoner. Rather, join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God” (2 Tim. 1:7-8). Reflect upon the fact that Micah 3:8 applies to Timothy and to every Christian. How does this apply to your life?

SPIRITUAL PREJUDICIAL PATIENTS (v.11)

Micah summarizes what all these leaders, secular and religious, are saying in 3:11, “Is not the Lord in the midst of us? No evil shall come to us.” The same verse says that these leaders “lean upon the Lord.” These leaders knew that the Lord had made a covenant with them. They knew they had been set apart and protected by Yahweh himself. But they were forgetting the conditional element to the covenant. When Solomon built the temple in Jerusalem, God had said, “Concerning this house which you are building, if you will walk in my statutes and obey my ordinances and keep all my commandments and walk in them, then...I will dwell among the children of Israel, and will not forsake my people Israel” (1 Kings 6:12-13). Three chapters later he also said, “…if you turn aside from following me, you or your children, and do not keep my commandments...then I will cut off Israel from the land which I have given them...And this house will become a heap of ruins” (1 Kings 9:6-8).

Clearly, the leaders of Micah’s day had forgotten these promises. They went through the motions of their religious activities, banking on a kind of “get out of hell free” card. They took the covenant for granted. Comfortable with their sin, they compartmentalized their religious lives from their working lives. Their religious actions were like charms to keep God on their side. In what ways do we do the same thing, going through our worship as a part of our schedule, leaning on our wealth or health or popularity? Do we expect calamity in our own lives from the Lord? What does it look like to lean on the Lord?

DIVINE ABANDONMENT (v.4, v.12)

Back in v.4, Micah said that these rulers “will cry to the Lord, but he will not answer them.” Typically scripture assures us that those who cry to the Lord in times of trouble will be heard and answered (Psalm 107 as an example). Micah 3:4 breaks this pattern. The Assyrian army invades. The evil rulers beg Yahweh for mercy. God hides his face from them. These rulers find themselves in the same position as the people they had
exploited. The powerless had asked the rulers for mercy, to no avail. Now the rulers ask God for mercy, to no avail. Proverbs 21:13 says, “He who closes his ear to the cry of the poor will himself cry out and not be heard.” One commentator calls this act of God “divine rejection” (Prior). Why is the Lord hiding his face? “Because they have made their deeds evil” (v.4). The key word is *made*. It implies deliberate, purposeful, progressive, insistent, defiant action. They did not slide off a slippery slope into evil, but chose evil. It was a lifestyle, a plethora of unjust decisions that had become institutionalized over the years. Justice had been so perverted that anti-justice was the very fabric of society. Again, they hated the good and loved the evil.

Finally comes 3:12, the only verse in the entire Old Testament that is directly quoted word for word in another part of the Old Testament. Certain elders quoted this verse to the religious leaders in Jeremiah 26:18 (100 years later) to remind them what happened when Micah predicted destruction. Jeremiah was also predicting dire circumstances for the land, but the leaders did not want to believe him. Yahweh was going to abandon his people for a time.

**How can you understand divine abandonment in light of the coming of the Messiah? The life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ have something to say about abandonment. How do you apply Micah 3:4 today?**
Synopsis: Micah 4:1-8 is the most famous depiction of hope in Micah. Coming after a chapter full of sin and judgment, this beautiful passage describes the worldwide shalom that Yahweh will bring through his remnant in the last days.

THE LATTER DAYS (v.1)

Perhaps the hardest thing about reading Old Testament prophetic literature is trying to interpret their statements about the future. This difficulty has led many skeptics to write off Old Testament prophecy as baloney. As we said, the prophets were primarily prosecutors of the Covenant; they weren’t mere fortune tellers. But they do make bold claims about the future state of the world. Micah uses the phrase “latter days” which comes from two Hebrew words: achar (hind, following, hereafter) and yom (day, age, hour). Some translations go with “latter days” and others go with “the Last Day.” The tension between the singular (Last Day) and plural (latter days) arises from the fact that, in one sense, it is a single massive event (like a spiritual Big Bang); but in another sense it goes on for millennia (as does the Big Bang). Either way you translate it, the latter days refer to a golden age that was to come when the Kingdom would overcome the Empire. The Messiah would come and bless the entire world with Peace.

It’s difficult to figure out precisely when the latter days will come. Sometimes the prophets write as if they were already in the latter days. Sometimes it sounds like the latter days wouldn’t come for centuries. For example, the Kingdom’s defeat of the Empire is happening when God defeats the Assyrian army (Micah 2:12-13). But the real defeat wouldn’t happen until 33 AD when Jesus broke through The Empire. And even that’s not final; the final defeat occurs only when Jesus comes again.

So, the prophets saw the Last Day as a many layered reality. When you drive up I-40 from Winston-Salem, NC, towards Asheville, there comes a place near Hickory where you first see the Blue Ridge mountains spread all the way across the horizon. In one sense they are a single phenomenon (singular like Last Day). In another sense they are multiple hills (plural like “the latter days”). If you were asked how far away the mountains were, it would be difficult to answer. There are many different layers of mountains in your visual field. It is the same with the prophets. When Micah “saw” (Micah 1:1) the Last Day he saw something like a historical mountain range. It was a single phenomenon but it was made up of multiple events spread out in time. So, when we come to interpret Micah 4:1-8 (or Micah 2:12-13) it is very difficult and we need to exercise caution.

A few principles that should always be followed: [1] always interpret the latter days as referring to the Messiah, [2] always realize that the latter days are happening now but that there is more to come, [3] never interpret the latter days in terms of the modern
geopolitical reality called “Israel.” The Kingdom of God that the prophets were writing about is necessarily centered on communities worshipping Jesus, never on a nation-state.

Read Isaiah 2:2-4. Both Micah and Isaiah are quoting an ancient poem. It must have been well-known if both of their communities knew about it. It is certainly a prophecy of colossal hope. Perhaps this oracle arose among storytellers who passed it down through a kind of unpublished oral tradition. No one really knows who wrote the lyrics to many great Negro spirituals (including one that is based on Micah 4:4: “I ain’t gonna study war no more”). Assuming Micah is quoting an ancient poem, why did he insert it here?

**REVERSAL (vv. 1-2)**

Notice the last phrase of chapter 3. Compare that to the first phrase of chapter 4. **What is the “mountain of the house of Yahweh”? Does it literally get lifted up higher than Mount Everest? Assuming your answer is no, what is the meaning of the metaphor?** Compare the rising mountain to verse 8. **How might those two verses interpret each other? How is a “growing mountain” like “restored dominion”?**

The Hebrew word “flow” usually appears in nautical contexts. But here it is describing people sailing into mountainous regions. Micah means to emphasize the velocity and intensity of the movement of the nations into the rising mountain. Remember that the nations were on trial as lawbreakers in Micah 1:2. They were rising up to destroy the mountain of Yahweh in Micah 1:6-7, 2:4 and 3:12. Notice the change in their attitude. **Has this actually happened in the 2700 years since Micah wrote these words? How is it happening in our day? How have we, as a particular church, been a part the flow of the nations to the Gigantic Mountain? How can we participate further in it?**

**UNIVERSAL SHALOM (vv. 3-5)**

Yahweh promises that when Mt. Zion is exalted to international stardom, there will be worldwide Peace. This Peace (Hebrew, “Shalom”) is more than the cessation of conflict. In the latter days there will be both an absence of war and the presence of prosperity. Shalom is what Adam and Eve lost in Eden. Shalom is what Israel just barely tasted in the early reign of King Solomon. It is epitomized by a massive proliferation of the glory of Yahweh over the whole planet. Peace and prosperity bubble up in the wake of his glory.

**Absence of War**

**Describe some of the elements of peace in verse 3.** Note: the phrase “decide for strong nations” doesn’t mean Yahweh is on the side of strong nations. It means that Yahweh will make decisions in even the highest halls of power. Note: a pruning hook is
something that farmers use to pick fruit way up high in trees. It is a long pole with a sharp, serrated knife attached at the end. **How has Yahweh worked peacekeeping into the legacy of the Church (Desmond Tutu, Jimmy Carter, Oscar Romero)? How are we doing this today? How can we do it in our community?**

**Presence of Prosperity**

**Describe some of the elements of prosperity in verse 4.** Compare Isaiah 17:2, Zech. 3:10. Also, notice that 1 Kings 4:25 presents us with a partial fulfillment of Shalom in the reign of King Solomon. Finally, take a look at 2 Kings 18:31 and observe that the Assyrians tempt Israel to surrender to them by offering the same promise of prosperity. It must have been part of the lingua franca in Micah’s world. **Remembering Micah 2:8-9 and Micah 3:1, why do you think that these particular phrases would be especially powerful to Micah’s besieged audience? How might we retranslate them in today’s context?**

Verse 5 is not a part of the original poem. Micah adds v.5. After hearing the exalted promises of vv.1-4, Micah’s audience says something like, “The powerful Empire is always worshipping other gods. The nations bow to anything but Yahweh. But no more! Not in the latter days. Therefore, weak as are, we will worship only Yahweh!” **How does Micah 4:1-4 prompt you to worship?**

**THE REMNANT (vv. 6-8)**

Given the hope of Israel’s increased strength, it is odd that Micah describes her people as weak: the remnant (v.7) are lame, driven away, and afflicted. Verse 7 captures the paradox neatly: “and those who were cast off, a strong nation.” **How can the cast off be strong? Is it still true today of the people of God? How is it a rebuke to the wealthy oppressors and their false prophets of prosperity? How is it a rebuke to prosperous American evangelicals?**

The words “assemble” and “gather” in verse 6 harken back to Micah 2:12 where the King is like a shepherd who gathers his noisy, bleating sheep in a pasture. Jesus has a strong desire to gather the “harassed and helpless” crowds “because they were like sheep without a shepherd”? **How have you been gathered in? How can we, as a church, be part of gathering harassed and helpless people?**
Micah 4:9-13
LORD OF THE WHOLE EARTH

Synopsis: The Israelites will be exiled from their own land to Babylon, but they will later be rescued. The pagan nations will appear to be winning, but ultimately they will be defeated. The Lord of the Whole Earth reigns over His own people and over all the nations, and He is the Lord of great reversals. The first reversal occurs in the middle of v.10. The second reversal starts in v.13.

REVERSAL #1

NOW (v.9)

Micah begins this section with “Now.” It’s an odd term, for it says that now they will go to Babylon. But we know from history that Micah was speaking between 740 and 690 BC, and the Israelites were not sent to Babylon until 586. That would be like your spouse saying, “I’m coming home now” and then not showing up for 100 years. So the biblical term “now” has a broader meaning than what we attribute to that word today. The term seems to have what one commentator rightly calls a “temporal thickness” (Prior). This is similar to the metaphor of the mountain range mentioned in the last study. Prior says that this temporal thickness prevents us from being able to pinpoint categorically when or how these prophecies will be fulfilled. Think about the difficulty of interpreting the phrases such as “in that day,” “then,” and “in the latter days.” These phrases designate an unspecified future time, and likely encompass a huge span of time, including the remnant’s restoration from Babylonian exile, Jesus’ birth, and the Messiah’s everlasting rule of peace. To summarize, the term “now” can refer to events that range across decades if not centuries. In 4:9-5:1, “now” is used four times.

GOD’S PEOPLE IN TRAVAIL (vv.9-10)

Micah depicts Israel in agony, and likens their pain to that of childbirth (“like a woman in travail”). The people “cry,” “writhe,” and “groan.” Labor pains are extremely piercing and rough, but they do culminate in new life. So there is hope even in this analogy. Next, Micah asks them why they are moaning. He asks, “Is there no king in you? Has your counselor perished?” (v.9). On the one hand, their ultimate king and counselor is in their midst: Yahweh. God has not abandoned them. On the other hand, they have no earthly king. Micah’s rhetorical question implies that the king of Judah, and all his counselors, are utterly useless. Their current leadership has utterly failed them.

Because of the failure of the leadership, the Southern Kingdom (Judah) would be destroyed: “for now you shall go forth from the city and dwell in the open country; you shall go to Babylon” (4:10). This is the first time that Micah has mentioned Babylon. As we have already seen, the Assyrians captured Samaria (capital of the Northern Kingdom, Israel) between 722-705. They ransacked the 46 towns of the Shephelah.
(the area surrounding Jerusalem) in 701. But the Assyrians never destroyed Jerusalem. That's where Babylon comes in. In 586--over 100 years after the Assyrian invasion--Jerusalem is completely sacked by the Babylonians and the Israelites are exiled. And, apparently, Jerusalem never had learned her lesson in those 100 years. The people never turned back to the Lord. One commentator says, “the city only staggered from crisis to crisis for one more century” (Marsh through Prior).

Micah uses a bit of holy sarcasm in v.10. The language of v.10 harkens back to Israel’s deliverance from Egyptian captivity. In that case the people went forth from Egypt to dwell in the wilderness on their way to the promised land of Canaan. In an ironic twist, Micah says, “...for now you shall go forth from the city and dwell in the open country; you shall go to Babylon.” There is perhaps a sardonic tone to it. Instead of resting safely in the promised land, they will be violently exiled to the foreign land of Babylon.

These predictions by Micah sounded completely absurd to the leaders in Jerusalem. Unthinkable. Unimaginable. The Lord’s presence rested in the temple on Mount Zion in Jerusalem. Would the Lord destroy His own house? Would He put His own people through that much suffering? What catastrophe in your life would be comparable to the Babylonian exile? Can you imagine how you would react? How would it shake your faith in Yahweh?

THE VICTORY OF THE REDEEMED (v.10)

The last half of v.10 is like “literary whiplash” to the reader. The reader is thrown from the unthinkable Babylonian exile to something surprising: rescue. “There you shall be rescued, there the Lord will redeem you from the hand of your enemies.” There is no gradual build up, no slow crescendo; instead it’s a complete turn-around within a single verse. From unrest to rest, from horror to joy, from excruciating pain to soothing rescue. But, notice the key word: there. There you shall be rescued. There the Lord will redeem you. There, in Babylon, in a type of hell. Before the people find rescue, they will have to face the destruction of Jerusalem, shameful captivity, and the death of family and friends.

Needless to say, we fail to believe that suffering is a necessary part of discipleship. Like Peter, we rebuke Jesus for suggesting that a cross dwells at the heart of all spiritual life. We desire God to intervene before or during the battle to prevent us from going through the pain. Consider how God continues to drag you through excruciating circumstances to refine you. Think of examples in your life. Is suffering ever meaningless or random?

God’s ultimate plan for His people is not destruction at the hands of the Empire. Rather, it is the establishment of the Kingdom. It is to give his people “a future and a hope” (Jeremiah 29:11). He rescues His people; He redeems them. Out of the furnace of woe comes the purified remnant. Look again at Micah 4:6-8. I’ve known many Christians who take great comfort from Jeremiah 29:11: “For I know the plans I have for
you, says the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.” In the midst of the Assyrian onslaught, very few Israelites would have had Jer. 29:11 cross-stitched over their mantlepiece. But Jer. 29:11 doesn’t imply a lack of suffering. Notice the verses just after Jer. 29:11: “Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will hear you. You will seek me and find me; when you seek me with all your heart, I will be found by you, says the Lord, and I will restore your fortunes and gather you from all the nations and all the places where I have driven you, says the Lord, and I will bring you back to the place from which I sent you into exile” (Jeremiah 29:12-14). The tenderness and deep love in these verses is a bit raw, like that of a father to a wayward son or daughter, or a husband to an unfaithful wife. Even as He takes Israel through miserable affliction, it is for her good; He loves her. Observe that Jer. 29:11 is not a promise for individuals (nor is it a promise of your best life now). No doubt, God deals with us as individuals, but it’s important to remember that He never dissociates us from His one bride, His church, who He is restoring to her original beauty.

Do you interpret your life differently when you view it communally, as being gathered up into the remnant of God’s people?

REVERSAL #2

THE VICTORIOUS EMPIRES (v. 11)

In v.11, we see “now” again. “Now many nations are assembled against you.” The nations say, “Let her be profaned, and let our eyes gaze upon Zion.” These are the taunts of Israel’s enemies. Even today, those who are against God take great pleasure in seeing the church profaned (Prior). And her enemies, particularly Assyria and Babylon, were strong and very powerful. The Assyrians were described as “one of the most bloodthirsty, manipulative, and arrogant of history’s evil empires” (Prior). And Micah’s ministry spanned the reign of four Assyrian kings. The attacks of Assyria on the Shephelah and on Jerusalem and the eventual victory of Babylon in toppling the capital make it appear that Israel’s enemies were winning. Where was God?

THE DEFEATED EMPIRES (v. 12)

In spite of Yahweh’s apparent absence, Micah says that the nations “do not know the thoughts of the Lord, they do not understand his plan, that he has gathered them as sheaves to the threshing floor.” That is an unbelievably hopeful verse. People who oppose God are oblivious to his thoughts. Perhaps they doubt he has any. His people, on the other hand, are given a window into his mental life. It turns out that Yahweh has plenty of thoughts. And his enemies play right into his thinking.

This pattern is reminiscent of Judges 4-5 where Deborah and Barak lead the Israelites in victory over the Canaanites. In chapter 4, the Canaanites think they have Israel trapped in a box canyon. With their chariots, they are a vastly superior military force. But in Judges 5 we see the events through spiritual eyes. It turns out, God has trapped
the Canaanites in the Kishon Valley in order to mire their chariots in mud and rain. Similarly, in Micah 4, the Israelites see that they are being humiliated by God-hating nations. But v.12 is a glimpse into what Yahweh was up to: gathering the Empires as sheaves to the threshing floor (bad news for sheaves) and chastening His people only to gather them again. Yahweh directs storms and sheaves as He wills. Amazing and mysterious is His sovereignty.

THE VICTORIOUS KINGDOM (v.13)

Micah describes the Israelites as a vigorous heifer, threshing her enemies with an iron horn and bronze hooves. Oxen, cows, or donkeys were used to thresh wheat. The animal would walk in circles over a hard surface where the wheat had been spread. They flattened raw wheat, loosing the edible cereal grain from the inedible hard covering, the chaff. (The next step was using a winnowing fork to throw the wheat up into the air on a windy day. The lighter chaff would blow away. The dense grain would fall back to the ground.) The Assyrians come to thresh but get threshed instead. God is using the daughter of Zion as a monster animal to “beat in pieces many peoples” (4:13). It’s a bloody image. God is carrying out His elegant, patient justice—a sweeping theme in Micah. Yahweh is King of the world. Empires bow before his throne no matter the circumstance.

Do you hunger for justice? Is your hunger to vindicate your good name or to establish that God is glorious?

The end of verse 13 has the Israelites devoting their spoils of war (“their gain” and “their wealth”) to the Lord. In Micah 1, the Assyrians destroy Samaria and take her idols and images for their own paganism. But in Micah 5, all the wealth of the conquest is given to the Lord for His honor and for righteous worship. God uses His people to carry out His justice and His people rightly worship Him.
Synopsis: Amid the ruins of Jerusalem, Micah publishes Yahweh’s greatest Messianic promise. The Messiah will come from tiny Bethlehem but will be from ancient of days. For her sins, Israel will be temporarily abandoned by Yahweh. But labor pains will lead to birth. Righteousness must have the last word. The Messiah shall reign.

CONTEXT (v.1)

The most explicit reference to the Messiah in the book of Micah is 5:2. The Messiah is the King of Israel. God has patiently, consistently promised that his Messiah would usher in a brand new world: the Kingdom of God. But now Israel is under siege in 5:1. “Now” her troops have been mustered to check Assyria, coming like a tornado. “Now” the right cheek of the King of Judah (Hezekiah) is about to be slapped as the ultimate sign of ignominy. Micah doesn’t even call him “King.” Reverting to the period before Kings, Micah calls him a mere “Judge.” Such are things in 701 BC. And Yahweh shines his light.

BETHLEHEM (v.2)

In the midst of disgrace, Micah reveals the Messiah: “right now we have a discredited Judge, but a time is coming ...”

David mounted the throne of Israel 300 years before Micah. Yahweh promised David, “Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever ... your throne will be established forever” (2 Sam 7:16). Israel waited for “great David’s greater Son” who would rule the planet evermore. Micah 4:8 alludes to the promise: “the former dominion shall come, kingship for the daughter of Jerusalem.” Micah 5:2 clarifies the Messiah’s identity: “he’ll come from the same place as David, tiny Bethlehem.” Thus, Micah is pinpointing the birthplace of the king: Bethlehem, David’s hometown. When the wise men of the famous Christmas story ask, “Where is the Messiah supposed to come from?” the scribes of Israel all agree, “Bethlehem.”

Joshua divided the promised land between 12 tribes. Joshua 15:20-63 lists every town to be given. Bethlehem doesn’t even make the list. Bethlehem is Kernersville. She reminds us that Yahweh wields the weak to shame the strong. He picked David instead of his older brothers. He conquered the Empire by crucifixion. He employs you. 1 Corinthians 1:26 says, “Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential ... God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong.” Think of other examples in Scripture that demonstrate this Bethlehem principle. Imagine the reaction of the haughty leaders of Jerusalem (see chapter 3) to Yahweh’s preferences.
Haughty children of Adam prefer a “gift set” to failure. Where have you experienced the peculiar preference of Yahweh?

ANCIENT OF DAYS (v.2)

Although the Messiah will come from humble circumstances, he will be “from ancient days.” This is a stunning title. William Blake’s painting Ancient of Days depicts God leaning over an abyss, opening his fingers in the act of creation. Writing hundreds of years after Micah, Daniel makes extensive use of the term “ancient of days” (three times in chapter 7 alone). Every time, this exalted title refers to the eternal dominion of Yahweh’s Messiah (Dan. 7:7,9,13). Micah didn’t know as much as Daniel about the divine nature of the Messiah. But he asserts that the one from Bethlehem will be older than Adam, predating creation.

Notice that the Messiah’s first priority is Yahweh. His coming is more than humanitarian. Yahweh says that it is “for me.” Remember, “hallowed be thy name” precedes “thy Kingdom come.” The King will cause the glory of God to fill the whole earth as the waters cover the sea. To swim in this sea of resplendence is man’s chief end and greatest joy.

IN THE MEAN_TIME (v.3)

Verse 1 brought the Israelite reader back to the difficulty in 701 BC: the Assyrian siege of Jerusalem. Verse 3 reminds the reader that the Messiah from Bethlehem hasn’t come yet. Israel must be “given up”--a frightening expression to any devout Jew. “He will give Israel up because of the sins of Jeroboam, which he sinned and made Israel to sin” (1 Kings 14:16). For a time Yahweh will leave Israel to her own devices. He will disown her temporarily. She is as terrified as he is devastated. “How can I give you up, O Ephraim? How can I hand you over, O Israel? My heart recoils within me; my compassion grows warm and tender” (Hosea 11:8). The metaphor of labor pains underlines the sorrow of this period. Many women say that their contractions before birth are the most painful thing they have ever experienced. Notice how Micah harkens back to 4:10, “writhe and groan, O daughter of Zion, like a woman in labor.” But there is hope: a baby awaits. There will be a remnant from Israel--a new kind of human being, born again. Think of a time you’ve sensed abandonment, “given up.” It could be now. How does the metaphor of pregnancy give you hope? Consider Romans 8:22-23. “We know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons.”

FUTURE DOMINION (vv.4-6)

To sum up, it’s bad in 5:1 (Hezekiah’s humiliation, 701 BC). It gets worse in 5:3 (the destruction of Jerusalem and ensuing exile, 587 BC). Yahweh intervenes. The “ruler of Israel” comes forth (v.2), ends the exile, restores the Kingdom, and eventually destroys
the Empire. Verse 3 hints of a “return” that will end the exile. Verses 4-6 flesh out this great hope, repeating many themes of Micah 4. Injustice prevailed in Micah’s day. Righteousness will prevail in the end. The remnant was encouraged.

Micah 2:12 says that the Messiah will be a shepherd. Micah 5:4-5 tell us more about this shepherd. He will stand invincible. Ezekiel, writing much later, says that the leaders of Jerusalem are corrupt shepherds. He goes on to say that Yahweh will come as the good Shepherd. Jesus co-opts Ezekiel’s imagery: he calls himself the Good Shepherd. Jesus says, “I am the incarnation of Micah 5:4.” This shocked and appalled the Jewish leaders of his day. It was clearly a claim to be the Messiah. This shepherd would not only rule over Israel, he would be great “to the ends of the earth” (v.4). He will bring peace. Verse 5 says, “He shall be their peace.” The Messiah won’t just bring peace, he will be peace personified. In Ephesians 2:13-14 Paul writes, “(13) But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. (14) For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility.” Notice that two hostilities are broken: man’s hostility to God (v.13) and man’s hostility to man (v.14). Paradoxically, the Messiah’s conquest will bring peace, deep and broad. **Think of concrete examples of peace that the universal dominion of the Good Shepherd has brought into your life. List some of these.**

Not only will the Messiah claim dominion, he will empower us to have dominion in his name. Notice the abolition of the Empire in v.6. Recall what was said earlier about the “latter days.” Some of Micah’s vision in v.6 was to happen when the army of Assyria was forcibly and suddenly ejected from Jerusalem in 701BC. But some was yet to come, farther up and farther in. Micah says that instead of quivering in fear at the threat of the most powerful Empire in the world, the people of Jerusalem “will raise against him seven shepherds and eight princes of men.” The expression “seven ... and eight” is a poetic Jewish way of saying, “a great number.” In other words, the Messiah’s dominion will be contagious, not only during the destruction of the Assyrian Empire, but in the larger destruction of The Empire that continues in our day. The Kingdom will win and we will take part in the victory. In C.S. Lewis’ children’s story *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, the Messianic lion, Aslan, defeats the evil White Witch. The book could have ended there. But in the last scene Aslan crowns the Pevensie children at Cair Paravel: Peter, Susan, Edmond, and Lucy. These children fought alongside Aslan; now they are sitting on thrones with the Lion. The New Testament promises us similar dominion in the famous Great Commission. In Matthew 28:16-20 Jesus says that because he has been given all authority in heaven and earth we can be confident in our Kingdom enterprise: baptizing and disciple-making. **How do you currently participate in the peace-keeping dominion of the Messiah?**
Synopsis: The faithful remnant of Israel is like dew and, paradoxically, like a lion to the surrounding nations. The apostate Jerusalem will be refined when God, himself a lion, “cuts off” everything that prevents Jerusalem from depending on Him.

CONTEXT

Remember that the corruption of disobedience had spread from Samaria in the North to Jerusalem in the South. The rulers, heads, judges, priests, and prophets of Jerusalem were not following God's law in the workplace but were instead exploiting the people for personal gain. In fact, they are described in chapter 3 as grotesquely butchering and then devouring the people. Yet these leaders went to the temple assured that no hardships would come their way because “the Lord is in the midst of us” (3:11). But God had promised that He would gather a remnant of His people. Though they were “lame, driven away, afflicted, and cast off,” they would believe. They were repentant; they wanted to trust Him. And they would have a new ruler, the mighty shepherd of 5:1-6, who would bring security and peace.

THE REMNANT... (vv.7-9)

Micah 5:7-9 focuses on the impact that the remnant will have on their neighboring nations. Notice that the remnant is “in the midst of many peoples” (v. 7, 8) and “among the nations” (v.8). They are not huddled together in an exclusive gesture. They are among and in the midst of many peoples, interacting with their unbelieving brothers in Jerusalem and the pagan foreign neighbors. In the sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, “You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trodden under foot by men. You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hid. Nor do men light a lamp and put it under a bushel, but on a stand, and it gives light to all the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 5:13-16). Ultimately, the church is the remnant that Micah is describing: salt and light to our neighbors. We are called to be a deeply penetrating contrast: different from the Empire (salty) and present in every crevice of the world (light).

Micah wants his audience to feel the remnant’s influence, and so he employs a pair of metaphors. The remnant will be both like dew and like a lion. In 2 Corinthians, Paul describes believers as spreading the fragrance of the knowledge of Christ everywhere. “For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life” (2 Corinthians 2: 15-16). “The same quality of life, the same
lifestyle, affects different people in dramatically different ways: some feel blessed and renewed, others feel battered and shredded” (Prior).

...AS DEW (v.7)

That the remnant will be “like dew from the Lord, like showers upon the grass” (5:7) implies at least two things. First, morning dew appears mysteriously; showers emanate from the heavens. Both have divine origins. They do not “tarry” or “wait” for men. Dew and rain are not awaiting human orders; they operate according to their own schedules. “The rain does not postpone its falling until man arrives on the scene” (Waltke). Likewise, the remnant does not trust man but God for their purpose; they do not look to man but to God for their success. The potency of the remnant is in direct proportion to the divinity of her origins.

Second, dew and showers are refreshing. They green a brown landscape, creating beauty and sustaining life. Living in the arid climate of Jerusalem and the Shephelah, the Israelites would have known the value of water. Micah’s audience would be particularly captivated by the metaphor of water: the blossoming colors, the smells of life, the moist soil. Such will be the effect of the remnant. Why? Because they are taking on the very character of Yahweh Himself as they fellowship and frolic with Him. As the Lord says to Israel, “I will heal their faithlessness, I will love them freely, for my anger has turned from them. I will be as the dew to Israel; he shall blossom as the lily, he shall strike root as the poplar; his shoots shall spread out; his beauty shall be like the olive, and his fragrance like Lebanon. They shall return and dwell beneath my shadow, they shall flourish as a garden...” (Hosea 14:4-7). The Lord is like dew to Israel, and thus Israel can be dew to the world. How is the Church like dew to the world? What are instances of the Church refreshing those around her, easing discomfort and bringing blessing to others? How do you personally refresh the nonbelievers around you?

...AS A LION (vv.8-9)

The remnant will also be “like a lion among the beasts of the forest, like a young lion among the flocks of sheep” (5:8). Verse 8 is startling. The effect of the remnant is now the very opposite of refreshing. Instead of cool, rejuvenating dew, we have the destructive king of the jungle: slaughter and death instead of growth and life. This lion “treads down and tears in pieces, and there is none to deliver.” In Micah 4:13, Israel was depicted as a strong bull who will “beat in pieces many peoples.” Now Israel is a lion who “tears in pieces.” God’s redeemed remnant will serve as his hoof and his claw to bring about justice on earth. He will not be mocked by the nations who raise their fists in defiance of Him. He is “the Lord of the whole earth” (4:13). As 5:9 delcares, “Your hand shall be lifted up over your adversaries, and all your enemies shall be cut off.” Again the remnant is likened to a lion specifically because its members are taking on Yahweh’s character. God says, “I will be like a lion to Ephraim, and like a young lion
to the house of Judah. I, even I, will rend and go away, I will carry off, and none shall rescue” (Hosea 5:14). As the remnant get to know Yahweh more intimately, they take on His “sterner qualities”--justice, purity, hatred of sin, resistance to human self-sufficiency (Prior). Lest we balk at “Old Testament” ferocity, recall the claw-like nature of the Messiah who said, “I have not come to bring peace, but a sword” (Matthew 10:34) and “Do you think that I have come to give peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division…” (Luke 12:51). **How is the Church like a lion to the world? What are ways that the Church disturbs, stirs up, and pains the world? How do you personally disrupt the nonbelievers around you?**

**THE LORD AS A LION**

Micah 5:9 ends with the prophecy that the Lord’s enemies “shall be cut off.” Then 5:10 begins with the Lord saying, “I will cut off...” which is a refrain throughout the next section. But, notice, the Lion is not mauling pagans in vv.10-14. He is raking His claw across His own people, to purge them from evil. The Lord is weeding his Imperial garden, pulling up weeds of apostasy to restore health and vigor. Think about some of the weeds and rocks that Yahweh continues to remove from his garden (read the parable of the Sower). Here are some of Israel's weeds and rocks:

- **Sorceries and soothsayers (magic/divination)**
- **Images and pillars/the work of your hands/Asherim (Canaanite idolatry)**

God's law stated, “Do not turn to mediums or wizards; do not seek them out, to be defiled by them” and also, “If a person turns to mediums and wizards, playing the harlot after them, I will set my face against that person, and will cut him off from among his people” (Leviticus 19:31, 20:6). Sorceries, soothsayers, and seers (Micah 3:7) were in the same category; it was all related to magic and divination. Pagan priests sought to figure out the will of their gods, to force the hand of divinity. Micah has already said that such seers and diviners will be “disgraced” and “put to shame” (3:7). God desired man to rely on him for their well-being and their futures.

Pillars were made of stone and used in cult prostitution and cult worship of Baal. Asherim were wooden images of the fertility goddess, Asherah. The Israelites, as we learned in the book of Judges, allowed the Canaanites to work and live within the borders of the promised land and thus to interact with the people of God. Slowly the Canaanites’ pagan worship practices and hand-made images seeped into the Israelite culture and corrupted the people. The people were deceived into thinking that they could control and manipulate the gods to get the desired effect: the conception of children, bountiful crops, needed rain. In many ways it resembled the prosperity gospel: if you obey certain practices, you will get the fruitfulness you desire. Yahweh could not be manipulated, and he hated this evil.
Horses and chariots (military offenses)
Cities and strongholds (military defenses)
God had clear laws against divination and idolatry. There were also laws against excessive military build-up. The king could not turn to his military (or any Empire military) for security (Deuteronomy 17:16). Recollect that Micah had accused Lachish, well-known for its chariot brigade and Egyptian horses, as the source of sin in Judah (Micah 1:13). In Micah’s day, retreating behind the thick walls of a fortified city brought complete safety; such cities were impregnable. It’s easy to understand why the people put their trust in these strongholds. But Assyrian siege warfare changed everything, and cities were no longer impenetrable. This sin of arrogant self-sufficiency had spread from Samaria to Lachish to Jerusalem. And Micah is saying, “God is coming in the guise of the Assyrian and Babylonian Empires to purge you of your military strongholds.”

God stands against any trust-substitutes. He’s not asking them to scale back on the chariots and sorceries; they must be cut off. These evils had “burrowed their way into the heart of the nation and become endemic” (Prior). Thus they had to be meticulously rooted out, and then destroyed. The remnant’s security was a false security. False securities always alienate God’s people from their covenantal relationship with Him (Watke). But the tendency remains. **What are the weeds of self-sufficiency “among” us, in our culture today, that choke our relationship with Yahweh as we tend to rely on them? What actions in our daily lives are evidence that we too-often fall into thinking that God is superfluous to our well-being?**

Verse 15 ends the section with God’s vengeance on the disobedient nations. Micah is no longer talking about the refinement of God’s people, but has turned to the pagan peoples that surround Israel. God will pour out His “anger” and “wrath” on them. Danger.
Micah 6:1-8
PROSECUTION

Synopsis: Yahweh prosecutes Israel: she has broken the covenant. Rather than delighting in the way that Yahweh delivered her, she has become bored by Him. In reaction to Yahweh's lawsuit, Israel promises to step up her dedication to the sacrificial system. Yahweh ends by telling Israel how she ought to have responded: with love.

LAWSUIT (vv.1-2)

The third section of Micah's prophecy begins as the entire book began--with a covenant lawsuit. Notice the legal terminology: “case, indictment, contend.” Yahweh is suing the entire world in Micah 1:2. In Micah 6:1 his case is against Israel. Once again, the setting is the courtroom. But this time the plea is personal. He is dealing with his own people.

The thrust of Yahweh’s argument is historical, which explains his appeal to the mountains. The mountains are the epitome of deep history: they’ve been watching Yahweh’s dealings with Israel for a long time. When Yahweh first made the covenant with Israel, he called on the mountains (3 times) as witnesses: ‘I call heaven and earth to witness’ (Dt. 4.26, 30.19, 31.28). Now he appeals to them again as the ultimate impartial witness. Incidentally, many of the cultures surrounding Israel worshipped the mountains as holy places; the meeting of heaven and earth. Against this hypothesis, Yahweh is posited as creator of mountains. The mountains, admittedly old, are not the least bit divine. Micah takes them down a peg: they are merely witnesses in Yahweh’s courtroom.

EVIDENCE (vv.3-5)

What is the substance of Yahweh’s controversy against his people? It is, significantly, not a list of crimes. Rather, it a passionate plea; like a husband pleading for his wife’s affection. God is concerned about the relationship, not the record. Strikingly, instead of giving a list of indictments, he asks them questions. This tenderness is all the more remarkable given what we’ve heard about Israel’s crimes in Chapters 1-5.

Consider Yahweh’s questions. Essentially he’s asking: “Have I bored you? Are you sick and tired of our story together: the festivals, the Passover, the sacrifices, the old songs, the Sabbath?” Israel’s silence is her answer. Between the two questions, there is no reply. In her quietude lies her guilt. Think about your relationship with your Creator. Is there silence? Are you responding?

In vv.4-5 Yahweh goes on to detail his love relationship with Israel. He makes reference to three or four events in their history: his liberation of Israel from slavery to the Empire;
the gift of great leaders like Moses, Aaron, Miriam; his ingenious defeat of Balak (turning his cruel devisings back on his head); and everything in between: from Shittim (the beginning of Israel's journey to the promised land) to Gilgal (Israel's first camp within the promised land). Imagine one lover recounting to the other some of the specific places and people in their relationship: “What about the first time our eyes met? Does that mean nothing to you? Or the first time we held hands? The first kiss? Our courtship? The wedding? The honeymoon? Have you forgotten our shared history?” Yahweh’s plea suggests that the only adequate motivation for holy living is gratitude. Luther said that gratitude is “the basic Christian attitude.”

To what extent does Christianity seem onerous to you? Is it a chore to engage in corporate worship, to pray, to read scripture? If so, how can you start to relive the saving acts of Yahweh in your life?

ISRAEL’S MISGUIDED RESPONSE (vv.6-7)

Yahweh’s entreaty ends in v.5. Who is speaking in v.6? It seems that Micah is speaking on behalf of Israel. He steps out of the speechless, stupefied crowd and responds to Yahweh. But even Micah, with the best of intentions, completely misses the boat here. Notice that the fundamental quality of the response is ‘work harder.’ Israel imagines that she can patch up things with Yahweh by means of a vast quantity of sacrifices. Heroic acts of sacrifice and righteousness can never repair the breach in any relationship. We think it can. It never works. Whether it’s a dozen roses or an increased tithe, external works are impotent to heal broken relationships. In the book of Judges, Jepthah thought that he could receive Yahweh’s favor if he sacrificed his child. He was simply adopting the superstitious attitude of the Canaanite Empire around him. What acts of heroic piety have you used to reconcile a broken relationship (with God or another human)? How effective have these strategies been in achieving your ends?

THE RIGHT RESPONSE (v.8)

Micah 6:8 is the most famous verse in the entire book. Notice that the verse begins “He has told you, O man.” “Man” is the Hebrew word “Adam.” So, Micah is taking us back before God’s covenant with Israel. Micah 6:8 is addressed to all humanity. As St. Paul says, all human beings—without exception—have the law written on their hearts. Made in the image of God, every person is supposed to be a clean mirror reflecting the beauty of God’s glory. As Micah says, “This is good.” We might say that a clean and polished image bearer is “well off.” Obedience brings beatitude.

On Interstate 4 approaching Tampa you pass a couple dozen partisan religious billboards. The thinly veiled vitriol of their imagery and language is disheartening. A little bit farther down the Interstate you come across a billboard that seems to be an intentional counter to the previous set. It shows a picture of a sunset and simply says: “Love God, love people.” This was Jesus’ summary of all the commandments. God has
the same message for every human being. **How should this inform our political and moral interaction with the non-Christians around us?**

Micah 6:8 is especially for God’s people. At it’s core is the universal message of love; nevertheless, Israel is being addressed specifically here. Verse 8 summarizes her particular obligation to the Covenant. There are three parts of Micah’s exhortation: do justly, love kindness, walk humbly with God. These three injunctions are the heartbeat of the many variegated commandments that Yahweh gave Israel in Exodus, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy. All the burnt offerings, calves, thousands of rams, and rivers of oil (vv.6-7) are dust and ashes without these three directives. To obey is better than to sacrifice. Any religion that doesn’t produce human beings that look like Micah 6:8 isn’t worth it’s salt. **Has your religious life become encrusted with external acts of piety rather than a loving friendship with God? If so, describe in detail some of the ways you need to turn back to a lively relationship with Yahweh.**

Micah 6:8 also describes the root of Jerusalem’s failures. For instance, in Micah 3:9 he says that Jerusalem “abhors justice” (rather than “doing” justice). Their treatment of the poor shows a complete lack of kindness (rather than “loving” kindness). In Micah 2:8 he condemns Israel for her arrogance (rather than humility).

Yahweh says (vv.1-5), ‘you’ve completely broken our covenant relationship.” Micah says (vv.6-7), “Absolutely ... we’ll step up the sacrifices ... we’ll do better.” To which Yahweh replies (v.8), “Let me tell you how I wanted you to respond to my lawsuit. You should’ve thrown yourself upon my mercy realizing that you failed to the core of your relationship with me.”

Notice that Yahweh has to give the response that Israel failed to give. The words of Micah 6:8 don’t really come from the unclean lips of Micah. He is part of the idiot hoard of work-addicted Israelites. Yahweh is speaking Micah 6:8 as the One True Israelite. Being God, Yahweh couldn’t be a true Israelite. So He became a man: Jesus. The truth is: we don’t look like Micah 6:8. Jesus does. **Like Israel, our daily response to Micah 6:8 should be to throw ourselves upon the mercy of God and ask to be made more like the Messiah. What are some of the other ways that you respond instead?**
Micah 6:9-16

GOD’S TRIAL CONTINUES

Synopsis: Micah 6:1-8 began God’s trial against the Israelites, and Micah 6:9-16 continues the trial. In the courtroom scene, God shows the Israelites their forgetfulness of him and their love of evil in the midst of his enduring faithfulness and goodness. Sandwiched between the two courtroom scenes is Micah 6:8, where Yahweh spells out for them what they should have been doing all along as his people. As the trial intensifies, God lists their crimes and then sentences them to living under the Deuteronomic curses.

GOD’S VOICE INTENSIFIES (v.9)

“The voice of the Lord cries to the city—” (6:9). The intensity of God’s pleas have been ramped up. Now He “cries” instead of “says” (6:1). We usually raise our voice when the person we are addressing is neither listening to our words nor heeding our warnings (think spouses and children). We saw in 6:6-7 that after initial silence, the Israelites’ response to God, although perhaps demonstrating a thawing of their cold hearts, was insufficient. And even though God gave them the quintessential answer in 6:8, they are still either not understanding or just not obeying. So God raises his voice. He is like a town crier in the streets of the city.

God’s voice is powerful, so powerful that everything in creation must obey his voice. In the Old Testament, God creates the heavens, land, light, aquatic swarming things, birds, creeping things, and human beings. This is all done with voice command. In the New Testament, sickness, the waves, the wind, even demons obey his voice. Man is the only created thing that disobeys and that he allows to disobey. Notice that when God first speaks in v.9, he cries, “Hear!” or “Listen!” He is insistent. We often treat God’s commands as suggestions—inconsequential nudgings—rather than the life and death realities that they are. **Do you feel the weight of any of God’s commands specifically in your life right now? Perhaps commands that are hard to hear and obey? How can we listen and hear?**

Verse 9 contains a perplexing phrase, “and it is sound wisdom to fear thy name.” Micah pulls away from the main prophecy with his own bit of advice. It’s even slightly comical. Micah, at least, is listening. He knows how to prick up his ears when God speaks. It is healthy and wise to attend to Yahweh’s voice and to be in awe of this supernatural, glorious being.

ISRAEL’S CRIMES (vv.10-12, 16a)

1. using “scant measures,” “wicked scales,” and “deceitful weights” (vv.10-11)

God asks two damning questions: “Can I forget...?” and “Shall I acquit...?” The implied but resounding answers to both are “No!” God never forgets and he never lets the guilty
go free; he is honest and just. His first accusation is that the commercial merchants and traders in the city were being dishonest in their business practices. God provided clear laws against such practices in the Mosaic law: “You shall do no wrong in judgment, in measures of length or weight or quantity. You shall have just balances, just weights, a just ephah, and a just hin” (Leviticus 19:35-36). An ephah was a unit of dry measure (for wheat); a hin was a unit of liquid measure (for oil and such). They were akin to our ounces or pints. Measuring was not nearly as precise in 700BC as it is now; the margin of error was 6%. It was much easier to cheat people. If a customer was buying a pound of wheat, the crafty merchant used a lighter weight, not quite a pound, on the scales. That way the customer paid, say, $5.00 for a “pound” of wheat but actually received less than a pound of wheat. If a customer was selling goods to the merchant, the merchant used a heavier weight. That way the merchant paid less money but received more wares. Sometimes the scales themselves (“wicked scales”) would be tampered with so that the pans were not symmetrical in weight or the balance arm was bent. The poor, the visitor, the ignorant were quickly taken advantage of in the marketplace (think of a bad used car salesman). By means of such corrupt practices the merchants had built up “treasures” in their “house” (v.10): selfish treasures. The citizens of the Kingdom of God were supposed to reflect Yahweh’s just character, not the greed and exploitation of the Empire.

2. violence, deceit, lies (v.12)
God starts with “your rich men” and goes on to accuse “your inhabitants.” Micah has already made it clear throughout the book that the rich included land barons, businessmen, kings and rulers and heads of Jerusalem, judges, false prophets, and corrupt priests. Their evil ways had so pervaded the entire system of the city—judicial, commercial, religious—that the inhabitants were forced to lie in order to save their own necks. The word “lies” encompasses all fraud and trickery. “The leaven of the ruling class is leavening the whole lump” (Waltke). People were bullied into giving false testimony in court to paper over the injustices of the rich. The rich had found their security in their wealth. They had forgotten the rock of their salvation: the Lord who is “The Truth.” What are examples in our own society of commercial corruption? In what ways, even small, do you cheat people? In what circumstances are you more likely to bend the truth or cheat a little? How can you fight against that tendency in yourself?

3. choosing the statutes, works, and counsels of Omri and Ahab (v.16a)
1 Kings 16:15-33 tells the story of two corrupt Israelite kings. Omri usurped the throne of Israel (he was not anointed as king) and founded the city of Samaria. He worshipped idols and “did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, and did more evil than all who were before him” (1 Kings 16:25). Ahab was Omri’s son. Ahab served Baal, made an Asherah, and erected an altar to Baal in Samaria. “Ahab did more to provoke the Lord, the God of Israel, to anger than all the kings of Israel who were before him” (1 Kings 16:33). These kings lived 150 years before Micah. Imagine being compared to Omri and Ahab (or Hitler or Mussolini). The leadership of Jerusalem was, no doubt, outraged by the comparison. But the people rejected the peaceful, compassionate statutes of Yahweh, preferring the greedy, self-serving ways of vicious dictators. This kind of evil is
the bitter fruit of idolatry. Baal “pandered to the sinful nature and demanded no moral rectitude” (Waltke). Yahweh, on the contrary, confronts sin head-on.

**GOD’S SENTENCE (v.13-15, 16b)**

The verdict: the Israelites are guilty of the crimes as listed. The leaders of Jerusalem may overlook wickedness and acquit the guilty deceivers, but not I AM (the literal translation of “Yahweh”). The “I” in v. 13 is emphatic and is in contrast to “your rich men” and “your inhabitants” in v.12.

God issues the punishment for their crimes. Many years before Micah, in the book of Deuteronomy, God actually described the curses that would come with disobedience. Deuteronomy 28 can be divided into blessings and curses: blessings that will fall on the people if they obey God; curses that will fall on them if they disobey. “But if you will not obey the voice of the Lord your God or be careful to do all his commandments and his statutes which I command you this day, then all these curses shall come upon you and overtake you...Cursed shall be the fruit of your body, and the fruit of your ground...You shall carry much seed into the field, and shall gather little in; for the locust shall consume it. You shall plant vineyards and dress them, but you shall neither drink of the wine nor gather the grapes; for the worm shall eat them. You shall have olive trees throughout all your territory, but you shall not anoint yourself with the oil; for your olives shall drop off” (Deuteronomy 28:15, 18, 38-40). One commentator calls these curses the futility curses, for the people undertake a course of action, but instead of being fruitful and productive, are frustrated in it.

Micah enumerates five of these curses in vv.14-15.

1. Eat but not be satisfied, apparently due to being struck with dysentery based on the language in v.14a.
2. Bring (to the birth) but not deliver. Some translations say, “put away but not save.” And anything that is finally born will die by the sword.
3. Sow but not reap—likely wheat, barley, and other crops.
4. Tread olives but not anoint with oil.
5. Tread grapes but not drink wine.

Endeavors are initiated but are always ultimately futile. Instead of producing life, the Israelites end up with death and sterility. **Do you ever see these “futility curses” (the law of diminishing returns) operating in your life?**

Notice in v.13 Yahweh says he has “begun to smite” the people. This punishment will be progressive and drawn out. The end result will be that he makes them a “desolation” (v.13 and v.16b) and a “hissing” and that they “bear the scorn” of the surrounding nations (v.16b). “The city will be so ruined that it will cause astonishment and horror for all who see it” (Waltke). Instead of the Israelites being a light to the surrounding unbelieving nations, they are the object of scorn.

**Where is our hope in this passage?**
Micah 7:1-7
WAITING FOR GOD AMIDST CORRUPTION AND CONFUSION

Synopsis: Micah describes the dissolute state of Jerusalem as a withered garden. He then pronounces woe upon her leaders. “If the leaders of God’s people are this bad,” he reasons, “how bad must all humans be.” Micah then details God’s punishment for Jerusalem’s sins: all human relationships will be shattered by malice and lies. The short section ends with Micah in a state of hopeful expectation that Yahweh will come to the rescue.

WOE (v.1)

Micah begins his final chapter by taking an imaginative walk through the city of Jerusalem. What he finds appalls him. The Hebrew reads, “Oi Ve” which means “woe is me.” Jesus also pronounced woe upon the religious leaders of his day. Pronouncing woe is the opposite of pronouncing blessing. It is saying, “You are killing yourself; terrible things are coming for you.” Micah’s “woe” is a wake-up call to the careless leaders of Jerusalem lounging “upon their beds” (Micah 2:1). But Micah resists self-righteousness. He overcomes the temptation of the critic to think that he is better than the criticized. He also pronounces woe upon himself in verse 1. At the beginning of Micah’s prophecy (Micah 1:8) he lamented and wailed for his sick city. Here, at the end of his prophecy, he enters their woe.

GARDEN OF THORNS (vv.2-4)

Micah employs the metaphor of a vineyard to describe his people. Isaiah used the same metaphor: “a pleasant vineyard, sing of it! I, the LORD, am its keeper; every moment I water it” (Isaiah 27:2-3). Jesus, following from the prophetic tradition, employs the same metaphor: “the kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard” (Matthew 20:1). The prophets understood that Israel was supposed to be a fruitful vineyard: a new Eden blossoming with the flowers and the fruit of righteousness. Jerusalem was her capital, the wellspring of the garden. But in Micah’s day Jerusalem was a place of briers and thorns (v.4). Imagine the horror of watching your favorite plant or flower drying up into a brittle stick and then growing thorns. Yahweh’s soul desires the sweet wine of his people’s obedience (v.1). He is intoxicated by the beauty of pure human goodness. But instead of wine he gets bloodshed (v.2). What are some of the ways that the church is more like a brier patch than a vineyard?

The good news is that the church is still called to be a vineyard. Yahweh hasn’t given up on his plan of creating a garden planet. Isaiah promised the church, “The LORD will guide you continually, giving you water when you are dry and restoring your strength. You will be like a well-watered garden, like an ever-flowing spring” (Isaiah 58:11). The
wine of righteousness is going to flow. Every nation is going to drink deep. **What are some of the ways that the church is intoxicating?**

ALL HAVE SINNED (vv.2-3)

Romans 3:23 says, “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” Micah 7:2 says, “There is no one upright among mankind.” Micah reasoned that if everyone in Jerusalem was twisted, how much more amongst the heathen. In Noah’s day “the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” (Gen. 6:5). Hence, the flood. In the 4th Century, an Irish monk named Pelagius came to Rome to start a revival. He must have believed that Paul, Micah, and Moses were engaging in hyperbole. For he confidently declared that sin was merely a social habit, a cultural trend. Anyone could resist sin by being firm with himself and going against the grain. Pelagius admitted that humans were predisposed to sin (as we are to “sweets”). But sin wasn’t a cancer; it was the flu. The scriptures consistently present a different picture. Humans aren’t drawn to sin but addicted to it. There aren’t a few godly people. “The godly have perished from the earth” (Micah 7:2). Human beings don’t accidentally fall into evil; we work hard at it: “Their hands are on what is evil, to do it well” (v.3). This is sometimes called the doctrine of Total Depravity.

Notice Micah’s evidence for Total Depravity: “All lie in wait for blood and each hunts each the other with a net” (v.2). This implies premeditation and active persecution. Consider the ways that we humans set traps for others. Consider the way we humans treat each other as prey. Consider the ways that humans spend time planning these things. This is only a part of Micah’s proof for Total Depravity.

Lawyers and government officials are supposed to create a safe space for people to do business. But in Micah’s Jerusalem, “the prince and the judge ask for a bribe” (v.4). Legal systems tend to become places where people get caught up in endless red tape, tangled in bribes. This is clearly the case in Jerusalem. If “the best of them is like a brier, the most upright of them a thorn hedge” (v.4), then imagine how it is with the worst of them. “The people with influence get what they want, and together they scheme to twist justice” (v.3, New Living Translation). Lord Acton famously said, “Power corrupts; absolute power corrupts absolutely.” But power doesn’t corrupt. Power allows the innate corruption of the human heart to have its way. The corruption of the prince and the judge are simply a window, opened widely, onto the bleak landscape of the human heart.

Think of the consequences of Total Depravity. Write them down. How should this influence the way you think about yourself? How should it influence the way you think about others?
PUNISHMENT (vv.5-6)

Micah lists a few of the consequences of Total Depravity in vv.5-6. Notice that Yahweh’s punishment is confusion (v.4). Planet earth was supposed to be a well-watered garden. Humans have filled it with briers and thorns. Twisted things create confusion. Sin breaks relationships and erodes trust. With terrifying detail, verses 5-6 describe broken trust in even the closest of relationships: neighbors prone to lawsuits, friends who gossip about each other, lovers who can’t trust the spoken secrets of each other’s hearts, sons sneering at their fathers, daughters rivaling their mothers, treason entering into the sanctuary of the home. Given the social degeneration of Western civilization, these examples don’t shock us. To an Israelite living in 720 BC, they were outrageous.

Think about the way you have seen sin create confusion in relationships. Ponder the examples of sin in vv.2-4. Consider the ways that they lead to the social disintegration described in vv.5-6.

HOPE (v.7)

Right when Micah’s audience is about to surrender to despair, he inserts a word of hope. In Micah 7:7, the prophet lifts his eyes heavenward. At some point in the life of every thoughtful human being, he will realize that the solution to his greatest problems will not come from any human agent (including himself). Like the dejected poet who wrote Psalm 121, Micah lifts his gaze up from humanity to divinity: “I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help. My help cometh from the LORD, which made heaven and earth.” No one likes to wait for anything. If you have enough money or influence, you might be able to avoid a good deal of waiting (you just order people around). But when it comes to God, man waits. Micah waits in verse 7. Salvation cannot be scheduled. Writing from the bottom of a thorny brier patch, Micah says confidently, “My God will hear me.” Micah sits in a pit of barbs and waits on Omnipotence, confident that salvation will come.

Think of a time when you have run up against an obstacle so large that you were rendered helpless. Try to remember the last time you threw your hands up in the air and said to yourself, “I’m finished. I have no more ideas.” (hint: a family reunion, contentious workplace, quarreling church). In such dire circumstances, have you ever been seized by an awareness of Yahweh’s saving presence? If so, describe the situation.
Micah 7:8-20
FINAL DELIVERANCE: A HYMN OF PRAISE

Synopsis: Micah 7:7 ends with Micah looking to God and waiting on him. Micah 7:8 begins to unfold three salvation oracles (each escalating in intensity): 1. Jerusalem rises from the ashes as God delivers her from the dark dungeon into the light (vv.8-10), 2. the garden city of Jerusalem teems with God’s sheep in the midst of a desolate world (vv. 11-15), and 3. though the pagan nations are silenced by God’s glory, some idolators turn to the Living God (vv.16-17). Micah 7 ends with a beautiful hymn to God, praising him for his steadfast love, compassion, and faithfulness (vv.18-20).

1. THE PHOENIX RISING FROM THE ASHES (vv.8-10)

Lady Zion sits in dungeon-like darkness as a captive of her enemy. She has been humbled and admits her sin. She is confident that the Lord will deliver her and lead her out of the dungeon and into the light of freedom. As she rallies from defeat, she is confident that God will turn the tide on her enemy. Her enemy will be shamed and will see the saving acts of this God named Yahweh.

THE ENEMY’S TAUNTS (vv.8, 10)

As Jerusalem is brought low, Micah and the people must endure the taunts from their enemy. Micah refers to the enemy with a feminine pronoun in v.10 (“her” and “she”). She “rejoices” and gloats in her victory over the people of Judah. Who is this enemy? At this point in Jerusalem’s history, the enemy was Ninevah, the capital city of Assyria. In the past the enemy would have been Egypt and in the future the enemy would be Babylon, Persia, Rome (the various incarnations of The Empire continue to this day). But behind every enemy of the people of God, behind the Empire, is the ultimate adversary of the Kingdom, the accuser, hurler of threats, taunter, mocker: Satan. For he “accuses them (the brethren) day and night before our God” (Revelation 12:10). This enemy even hurls the death-blow question at Micah, “Where is the Lord your God?” In times of darkness, how easy it is to believe that God is deaf, disinterested, or even dead. Jesus was tempted to believe the same thing. The chief priests, scribes, elders, and other passers-by mocked Jesus harshly while he hung on the cross. “Wagging their heads,” they said, “He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he desires him...” (Matthew 27:39, 41, 43). Jesus endured mockery so that we might have his power to endure mockery. Jesus, alone, really did experience total absence of the Divine. He did it so that we would never have to. The very name “Immanuel” is a promise that God is with us (even when our skeptical friends tell us that God cannot possibly exist in a world as evil as ours). In what ways do you feel mocked and taunted by the unbelieving world, even subtly?

Micah 44
QUIET CONFIDENCE (vv.8-10)

The daughter of Zion, Jerusalem, is not presumptuous. She does not say that she will not fall. Instead she says, “when I fall, I will rise” and “when I sit in darkness, the Lord will be a light to me” (v.8). Jerusalem knows that she will suffer under the Assyrian army; she admits that her punishment is just. But she also knows that, in the very midst of that unspeakable suffering, the Lord will be sufficient. The time of desolation and darkness will be progressive and prolonged (Micah 6:13), but eventually God will deliver her, bring her into the light, liberate her from the dungeon. There will be a time when God “will bring me forth to the light” and she “shall behold his deliverance” (v.9). She holds onto the promise from Yahweh that deliverance will come from this just and mighty shepherd-king of Micah 5:2-4 and 2:13. She also voices her hope that God will bring about the great reversal, in which the enemy who treads and shames others will be herself trodden down in the mud of the streets and covered in shame.

At times Christians are mocked for believing in Jesus. Paul says, “I am not ashamed of the gospel” (Romans 1:16). He tells Timothy, “Do not be ashamed then of testifying to our Lord” (2 Timothy 1:8). Obviously, there is something in the human heart that has great difficulty sharing the gospel. How do you maintain a quiet confidence in such situations?

BEARING THE INDIGNATION OF THE LORD (v.9)

Verse 9 is one of the most profound verses in Micah: “I will bear the indignation of the Lord because I have sinned against him, until he pleads my cause and executes judgment for me.” First, Jerusalem can bear the Lord’s judgment because it is just. Jerusalem is admitting her sin against God. All of our sin, even though it typically involves other humans, is primarily against God. Repentance--facing up to one’s sin, naming it, hating it--is crucial. If you excuse your sin or blame God for it, no relief comes. The city of Zion says that she will endure God’s anger and wrath toward her because she deserves it. There’s a startling humility here. It’s a humility that Cain did not have when the Lord punished him after he murdered his brother, Able. Cain exclaimed, “My punishment is greater than I can (should?) bear” (Genesis 4:13). We often feel as though we don’t deserve to suffer ... at least not that much. We get fidgety and sputtery when we come up against the smallest of hardships or offenses. How do you act when you sin against other people and God? Especially if you name your sin and apologize, do you feel you deserve the indignation and anger from the other person? If the other person continues to be angry or hurt or sulky, do you begin to feel indignant yourself? What does this show you about how you view your sin?

Second, Jerusalem can bear the Lord’s judgment because it is measured (“until he pleads my cause and executes judgment for me”). God’s judgment does have a limit; for the elect--for the remnant--his punishment is temporary. As we see later in chapter 7, God “does not retain his anger forever” (v.18). He is, instead, the type of God who ultimately “delights in steadfast love” for his people (v.18). He treads our sin under foot.
and casts it into the sea (v.19). His final judgment is against sin itself to free his people for all time. His punishment is purposeful, as we saw in Micah 5:10-14. He is the Lion of Judah who rakes his claw across his people to tear down their strongholds and to cut off their idolatry. It is terrifying but ultimately good. Jerusalem will bear the indignation of the Lord “until he pleads my cause and executes judgment for me.” She has a quiet confidence that the Lord, no longer her accuser as in Micah 6, will be her legal advocate, pleading her case and executing judgment, not against her anymore, but for her.

2. A WIDENING AND LUSH SHEEPFOLD (vv.11-15)

WIDENING (vv.11-12)

After Judah has been made desolate, first by the Assyrian army and later by the Babylonians, there comes a time when the city will rebuild its walls. But Micah says that the boundaries of Jerusalem will not be as they were previously; they will be extended. Why? Because, “in that day,” there will be more people in the city than there were previously. The exiled Jews will return to their homeland and with them will come the nations “from Assyria to Egypt, and from Egypt to the River, from sea to sea and from mountain to mountain” (v.12), i.e. from the North, from the South, from everywhere across the world. The holy city of God--the Church, and eventually the new Jerusalem of Revelation 21--will be made up of “many nations” who will “flow” into “the mountain of the Lord” (as we saw in Micah 4:2). This is an image of a sheepfold that is teeming with so many redeemed sheep that the gentle Shepherd must move the fence outward to make enough room for the little creatures as they stream in. We see the “temporal thickness” of Micah’s prophecies again here. For the picture is one of the returning Jewish exiles but also of all the gentiles that will enter into the kingdom over time. Gentiles had already begun to enter God’s fold with Rahab and Ruth, but they continue to enter to this day, and will continue to enter until the new Jerusalem is complete.

LUSH (v.14)

This new city, with it’s increased capacity, is also described as a “forest” in the heart of a lush “garden land.” We don’t usually associate city life with country life, the urban with the rural. But here the two are meshed into one. Micah compares this garden to Bashan and Gilead, a couple of beauty spots in the holy land that the Israelites would have recognized. Bashan was fertile country known for its lofty oak trees and fat cattle. Gilead, too, was known to be good pasture land. This vibrant land is where the redeemed will “dwell,” which in Hebrew has the connotation of permanence. They dwell “alone,” meaning apart or away from alien or hostile influences.
THE DESOLATE EARTH (v.13)

This large, beautiful, and fertile, sheepfold, full of the redeemed, is easily distinguishable from its desolate surroundings. The rest of the earth has been laid waste by the judgment of the Lord because of the evil deeds of idolators who have spurned God’s mercy and love. The garden of God’s people sits in the middle of a barren and empty land.

THE SHEPHERD (v.14-15)

Micah asks the Lord to shepherd these people in the garden, to tend to the “flock of thy inheritance.” The people of Jerusalem should have been disinherit ed based on their actions of forgetting their God and turning away from his beautiful law. Instead, the Lord, in his extravagance, has mercy on them and pardons them. He nurtures his sheep by protecting them with his “staff” and by feeding them--by allowing them to graze in the green grasses of Bashan and Gilead. “As in the days of old” (v.14) and “as in the days” (v.15) remind the people of Yahweh’s past saving acts in Egypt, when he brought them out of slavery and rescued them from Pharaoh’s grasp by drowning the Egyptians in the Red Sea. The new shepherd, like the old, will show his people “marvelous things.” The exodus from Egypt was the historical marker for Israel. The Exodus reminded Israel what kind of God was theirs. It was the demonstration of God’s hesed--that is, his steadfast love for his people. In v.15, the Shepherd speaks. He says that, in the future, he will again show his people acts and wonders that will bring them to their knees in awe.

Similar to Micah 6:7, where the remnant is depicted as dew to the nations, 7:14 is a depiction of the Lord himself as dew to his people. He refreshes them, waters and feeds them. He gives them lush land. **How is God, even now, tending to you, a member of his flock? What are some of his past saving acts in your life?**

3. THE PAGAN NATIONS SILENCED (vv.16-17)

Not only will the restored remnant “behold his deliverance” (v.9) and see the “marvelous things” God will do, but even Jerusalem’s enemies will gaze upon all that the Lord does. For Jerusalem’s enemies, i.e. the Empire, “shall see” (as in 7:10) and will be ashamed of their violence and their taunts. These enemies, in fact, will be so shocked and horrified by what they see, they will be rendered mute. No longer will they taunt, “Where is the Lord your God?” for they will see him. They will turn their ears away from those blaspheming the Lord and thus be rendered “deaf.” The people of the Empire will be so humiliated that their faces will lie flat against the ground. Thus they “shall lick the dust like a serpent, like the crawling things of the earth.” Bewildered, they will emerge “trembling” from their strongholds that have now been “thrown down” (Micah 5:11), for the Lord will show that he is the only real stronghold, the only real place of security. They will be unable to cover themselves; they will have no place to hide. And some of
these shocked pagans “shall turn in dread to the Lord our God.” Some, possessing a healthy awe of the Lord, will turn in repentance. **Think of a pagan that you know whom you would love to see come to faith. Could you pray some of these verses for them? That they would see, be ashamed of their pride, and turn to God in rightful fear and awe?**

**APPROPRIATE PRAISE (vv.18-20)**

The book ends with a hymn of magnificent praise. We expect the praise to center on the Lord’s justice. The entire book of Micah has been a contrast between the injustice of Jerusalem’s corrupt rulers and the righteous Lord’s perfect justice. But the hymn eludes our preconceptions, bubbling over with praise for the Lord’s hesed. His hesed is his “steadfast love,” “compassion,” and “faithfulness”; it is an emotionally-charged, unchanging commitment to his beloved.

The Lord had been faithful to the Israelites as he had “sworn to (their) fathers from the days of old.” He had rescued them from the Egyptians by sparing their first born children via “passing over” them and by “cast(ing)” Pharaoh’s army “into the depths of the sea” (vv.18-20). This language is reminiscent of the song of Moses in Exodus 15, in which Moses and the people praised the Lord for his saving acts in bringing them out of Egypt. Moses had asked, “Who is like thee, O Lord, among the gods?” (Exodus 15:11). Micah likewise asks, “Who is a God like thee...?” And for what is Yahweh being praised? For “pardoning iniquity and passing over transgression for the remnant of his inheritance.” In Micah 6:11, God indicated that he would not “acquit the man with wicked scales and with a bag of deceitful weights.” So how can he pardon the sins of his people and pass over their transgression? He can, because he sent his son, his Messiah shepherd-king, “to pardon”, literally “to bear,” our iniquity. Jerusalem can “bear the indignation of the Lord” (v.9) only because the son bore the indignation of the Lord for us. Yes, the Father “will tread our iniquities under foot” and “cast all our sins into the depths of the sea.” And the cost will be his son. In order to prove his justice, his son must bear the curses of the covenant. And in the cross of Christ, he trampled and threshed our sin in a final death-blow. Therefore, let us throw the weight of our sins on the cross. God has “sworn” that it will not fail. He never breaks his promises. **Think about a couple of the sin patterns in your life. It’s common to feel defeated by these patterns of sin because they crop up daily, again and again. Thus, we have to remind ourselves, again and again, of the Lord’s hesed and the unassailable strength of his promises and his devotion to us. Do you remind yourself of God’s hesed very often? What are ways you can do this?** Compare this last praise hymn in Micah to Exodus 34:6-7 and Psalm 103:8-12, 17-18. If you ever wondered how God would describe himself, the Exodus passage is fascinating.