

# OLD TESTAMENT SURVEY

## *Lesson 49*

### Micah: Who is Like YHWH?

I don't often quote Scripture in the courtroom. Of course, Scripture is the basis of what I do, and anyone who listens to my arguments will hear echoes of Scripture in much of what I say and how I say it. Still, a blunt chapter-and-verse quoting of Scripture in Court I can only remember doing once.

We were in trial in the small town of Wharton, Texas. I was trying the case as the lead plaintiff's lawyer, and assisting me was my friend Edward Fudge. On the first day of trial, we were in the process of selecting the jury. Our scan of the potential jurors showed the local Baptist pastor as a potential juror. Normally, a preacher never makes it onto the jury because lawyers know that preachers are leaders. The whole point of the jury system in America is to have enough jurors to where a corporate decision is made, rather than that of just one person. When you put on a very strong leader, like a preacher, that one leader can become a jury of one. All others jurors might follow that one leader, defeating the purpose of a jury of 12.

In the selection process, we are allowed to ask the potential jurors questions. I singled out the pastor and asked him if he had ever been put on a jury. He explained that he had come to jury duty many times, but never made the cut. I explained the reason why, adding that lawyers only want a strong leader if they know which way they are likely to vote! For me to decide if this preacher was right, I needed to know a few things. First, what was his favorite sermon subject? ("The love of Christ.") Second, did he believe in absolute rights and wrongs? (He did.) Finally, was lying wrong? (Of course, he said yes.) At that point, I declared that I had no issue with him on the jury, daring the other side to cut him. The preacher made the jury, and, I believe, had a number of his church members on the panel as well. As the trial drew to an end, we were set for closing argument. Edward suggested that I consider starting my closing argument with Micah 6:8. It seemed right with the preacher being the likely foreperson. Accordingly, my closing argument began,

"Ladies and Gentlemen, we have all heard the expression, 'Preaching to the choir.' Today, I feel like I am preaching to the preacher!" There were a few chuckles from the jury, including the preacher.

I continued,

"So for my sermon – slash – Closing Argument, my text is from the Old Testament book of Micah. In the 6<sup>th</sup> chapter, the 8<sup>th</sup> verse, the prophet asks

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the questions, ‘What does the LORD require of you?’ He then answers, ‘To love justice, do mercy, and walk humbly with your God.’ You are here,”

I added after an appropriate pause,

“to do that very thing – to do justice. And justice will lead into the prophet’s cry for us to ‘love mercy,’ because by teaching these defendants (who were both 24 years old) that they cannot get through life lying, is actually an act of mercy. That is something we try to teach our children before they leave elementary school. Somehow these two have made it into their twenties without learning this.”

From there, I led into the evidence by saying,

“Now why do I claim that a proper verdict is just? Let us review the evidence together...”

When I was finished, the defense lawyer stood up to argue his case. I did not know this lawyer, and he did not know me. This was not a case we had prepared; it was one I was trying for a friend, so the lawyer had never met me before trial. It readily became apparent that the lawyer figured I did not know Scripture, but had just appropriated some random verse in hopes of securing the preacher’s vote. Bless his heart, he figured I knew nothing about the Bible, and now he was in a bit of a quandary. How was he going to point out that I was, in his mind, unfairly using the Bible, and yet show that he could more rightly divide the word of truth?

He began his closing statement,

“Ladies and Gentlemen, I am appalled that Mr. Lanier would try to quote Scripture in this case. Mr. Lanier doesn’t know the Bible. If he did, he would not have used the Old Testament. The passage of the Bible that applies to this case is found in the New Testament in the writings of the apostle John...”

Immediately in my brain, all the writings of John flashed through in rapid succession. I could not figure out where he was going! Nothing in the gospel of John seemed to apply. Nothing in the epistles of 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, or 3<sup>rd</sup> John. Goodness, I could not even think of a verse in Revelation that could work, save where John called Satan the Accuser of the Brethren, and surely he was not going there!

He continued,

“The apostle John wrote in the book we call First Corinthians...”

Oh my, I thought. This fellow just made a huge mistake trying to be something he is not! I shot up out of my chair raising my hand in the air and proclaimed,

“OBJECTION!”

The judge, the opposing lawyer, and the jury, all looked at me. I lowered my voice and then calmly continued,

“The Apostle John did not write First Corinthians. It was written by the Apostle Paul!”

The preacher on the panel started chuckling, several other jurors were chuckling or gasping, and Judge Sklar, a church-going man, gazed up momentarily at the ceiling, then leaned into the microphone and said,

“I will have to sustain that objection. First Corinthians was written by the Apostle Paul.”

At that point, the court broke into laughter, all but the defense lawyer, that is. He stumbled a bit and then tried to get going again.

When I had translated Micah in college, I never dreamed I might use it in court. It actually works well there, however, because a principle concern of Micah was the injustice in Israel in his lifetime. Indeed, a number of scholars reference much of Micah’s message as a “prophetic lawsuit” or at least a “legal procedure.”<sup>1</sup> Micah speaks of witnesses, judges, and legal complaints! We will see that as we unfold Micah in a bit more detail than I was able to that morning in court!

### **BACKGROUND: WHO IS LIKE YHWH – MICAH**

Micah may be my favorite Old Testament book I have translated. The Hebrew is fun; it is loaded with word play, artistically assembled into a powerful punch. The prophet Micah takes full advantage of his name as he proclaims the word of the LORD to the nations, especially Judah. In Hebrew, “Micah” is a sentence name. It combines three different Hebrew words. The Hebrew “*Mi*” means “who,” the Hebrew “*ca*” means “is like,” and the Hebrew “*h*” is shortened from “*yah*,” which is shortened for “YHWH,” the name that God gave Moses at the burning bush (Ex. 3:14). The book is summed up in Micah’s name as the seven short chapters continually prompt the reader to ask the rhetorical question, “Who is like YHWH?”

Micah is not writing his own musings about God. The book begins in Hebrew with the pronouncement: “*devar YHWH*” meaning “The word of YHWH.” This

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<sup>1</sup> See the discussion and citations on the differing opinions of using this legal terminology in Barker, K. L., *The New American Commentary: Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah*, (Broadman & Holman 2001), Vol. 20 at 48.

signifies the book is one of prophecy. The words are not man's musings, but the very oracles and words of YHWH. While the microphone is one named, "Who is like YHWH?" the words are those of YHWH himself!

Micah delivered these words during the 8<sup>th</sup> Century BC, at a time when Judah/Israel faced ominous problems nationally and internationally. The national problems stemmed from the overt disobedience of the people. The international problems dealt with the resurgence of the powerful Assyrian nation. This was the time when Assyria was rapidly becoming the largest superpower humanity had ever seen, using imperial expansion to destroy smaller nations and incorporate their peoples as transplants elsewhere in the empire.<sup>2</sup> Micah was a contemporary prophet with Isaiah, and we find in his book, many ideas and even words that the two shared in the face of these internal and external issues.

Micah is put together in layers that alternate words of judgment and words of salvation. The typical commentary approach to the text is to study these cycles in order, comparing and contrasting the ways they are assembled and the messages they contain. Instead, our study of Micah will focus on three perspectives of Micah's inherent question: Who is like YHWH?

### **WHO IS LIKE YHWH: THE EXPECTED AND THE UNEXPECTED**

As Micah delivered the word of YHWH to his age, we immediately see YHWH moving in ways both expected and unexpected. In the very first chapter, we are introduced to wordplay as God seizes upon the language of the people to deliver his warnings which they might expect simply by the names involved. The book begins noting that YHWH is enthroned in his Heavenly Temple, indicating his total control and jurisdiction over earth. In the text, he descends to the world to exercise his dominion. YHWH is "coming out of his place, and will come down and tread upon the high places of the earth" (Mic. 1:3). "High places" (Heb. *bamot*) refers to both geographical "high places" (*i.e.*, hill tops and mountain peaks), and pagan shrines set up on higher ground (to be closer to the gods worshipped) contrary to the instructions of YHWH (1 Ki. 11:7, 2 Chron. 28:25; Amos 7:9). It was a continual problem in both Samaria and Judah. Even in Jerusalem, the temple was treated as a pagan altar on the high places (a problem in the time of Micah eventually fixed by King Hezekiah 2 Ki. 18:1-6). Micah brings this point home in verse five where YHWH descends from his throne to tread upon the high places because of the "transgression of Jacob." This stems from the

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<sup>2</sup> For greater detail on the revelations of this time, see the historical and archaeological data contained in prior lessons on Assyria, Isaiah, Hosea, the fall of Israel, and the reign of Hezekiah, all available in audio, video or text at [www.Biblical-Literacy.com](http://www.Biblical-Literacy.com).

capital Samaria, and the “sins of the house of Israel” rooted in the “high places of Judah,” which is “Jerusalem” (Micah 1:5).

The sin of the nation is not something easily fixed. The people of the northern kingdom (“Samaria”) had passed a point of no return, and were influencing the people of Judah (the “Southern Kingdom”):

For her wound is incurable, and it has come to Judah; it has reached the gate of my people, to Jerusalem (Mic 1:9).

Micah then uses more wordplay to describe the lamenting that will accompany the coming tribulation and destruction. We lose the wordplay when the translators use the place names. The key to understanding the wordplay is to understand the meaning of the place names:

### **English Standard Version**

### **Substituting Place Name Meanings**

In Beth-le-aphrah roll yourselves in the dust...  
Pass on your way, inhabitants of Shaphir, in nakedness and shame;  
The inhabitants of Zaanan do not come out...  
For the inhabitants of Maroth wait anxiously for good, because disaster has come down from the LORD to the gate of Jerusalem...  
The houses of Achzib shall be a deceitful thing (Mic. 1:11-14).

In the “House of Dust” (“*Beth Le-aphrah*”) roll yourself in dust...  
Pass on your way, inhabitants of “Beauty Town” (“*Shaphir*”), in shameful nakedness;  
The inhabitants of “Flock Town” (“*Zaanan*”) do not come out [with their flocks]...  
For the inhabitants of “Bitterness Town” (“*Maroth*”) ache for good, yet disaster has come down from the LORD to the gate of Jerusalem...  
The houses of “Deceptionville” (“*Achzib*”) shall be a deceitful thing (Mic. 1:11-14).

There is a great deal more word play, but these examples suffice to give a flavor of Micah’s technique.<sup>3</sup> Micah spoke with artistic power about the judgment coming upon Israel because of its sin. In this sense, YHWH is unlike any other, for he was coming with power to punish the idolaters and transgressors. In the same vein, this action should be expected. In Deuteronomy 28, God warned the Israelites generations before:

If you faithfully obey the voice of the LORD your God...all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you... But if you will not obey the voice

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<sup>3</sup> Scholars debate how to put the words together in some of the examples. Good examples are found in Wolf, Hans Walter, *Micah the Prophet* (Fortress 1981), at 14. E.g., verse 11: “They are blowing the alarm for you on a ram’s horn, you inhabitants of Hornvillage.” See also the exhaustive analysis by Waltke, Bruce, *A Commentary on Micah*, (Eerdmans 2007), at 10ff.

of the LORD your God...then all these curses shall come upon you and overtake you (Dt. 28:1-2, 15).

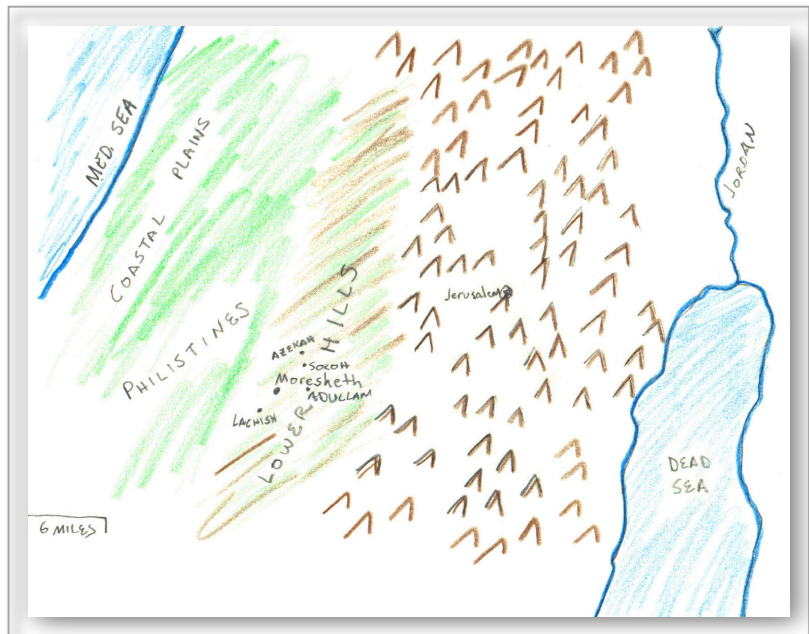
Micah pointed out a core sin of the people was that of coveting. Of course, coveting was explicitly sin as explained, among other places, in the Ten Commandments:

You shall not covet you neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor's (Ex. 20:17).

Micah saw this coveting firsthand. Micah pointed out that the evildoers not only coveted, but also used their positions and power to seize that which they coveted:

Woe to those who devise wickedness and work evil on their beds! When the morning dawns, they perform it, because it is in the power of their hands. They covet fields and seize them, and houses and take them away; they oppress a man and his house, a man and his inheritance (Mic. 2:1-2).<sup>4</sup>

Culturally, this makes a bit more sense if we place Micah in his hometown of Moresheth. Over a decade earlier, Rehoboam built Moresheth as one of the towns providing an outer ring of defense for Jerusalem (2 Chron. 11:7-9). Moresheth was in the lower hill country (the "Shephelah") about 25 miles southwest of Jerusalem. It was one of a ring of five fortress cities built within a radius of 6 miles of Moresheth,



guarding Jerusalem from the Philistines and others who might try and invade from the Southwest. As such, it undoubtedly had a number of officials from Jerusalem, as well as army commanders, who were stationed in the area. It is not hard to see these officers coveting the aesthetically pleasing country houses and seizing them,

<sup>4</sup> Wolf notes that this passage begins with the word "Woe." This was a word of lamentation typically used when death had struck a family or community. Wolf writes, "According to Micah's adaptation of this woe, the selfish schemers are actually rotting corpses." Wolf, at 11.

tossing people out of their homes and inheritance rights, in the name of government and civil defense.<sup>5</sup> While this may have been legal at the time, it was not right!

Against these sins and abuses, we hear the voice of Micah proclaiming, “Who is like YHWH?” as the God of the unexpected! God brings ironic judgment on these abusers. These people devise wickedness to get their choice real estate, so against them the LORD devises disaster. These people destroy families, and so the LORD will bring their families to ruin. These people wrongfully expel families from their inherited homes, and so the LORD will remove the fields from them and give them to an apostate:

They covet fields and seize them, and houses and take them away...Therefore... he [the LORD] removes it from [the usurpers]. To an apostate he allots [the usurpers’] fields (Mic. 2:2-4).

They oppress a man and his house... Therefore thus says the LORD: behold, against this family I am devising disaster, from which you cannot remove your necks (Mic. 2:2-3).

This unexpected response of YHWH goes further than simply the usurpers of property. At the time, there were professional prophets. These were supposed to be holy men who could give the counsel of God to those in need. In Micah’s day, however, these were not holy men seeking to help in God’s name. They were instead men who used their profession to line their own pockets. In modern parlance, we might say they were of the “pay to pray” ilk. Once paid, these “prophets” would not even dispense the true word or counsel of God. Instead, they would proclaim the words desired by those with itching ears. Pay them, and they would say what you wanted to hear, whether it was true or not!

These professional prophets would hear Micah’s proclamations of YHWH’s coming judgment and their reply was two-fold. First, they “preached” that Micah should not “preach!”

“Do not preach”—thus they preach—one should not preach of such things (Mic. 2:6).

These prophets’ message was more along the lines of “get drunk and have fun,” just what the people wanted to hear!

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<sup>5</sup> The archaeological site of Moreseth is today’s *Tel Goded*, an unexcavated site. It sits on the southern tip of a ridge that separates the more exposed “Western Shephelah” from the more protected “Eastern Shephelah” of Judah. The view from the site is stunning. On a clear day, one can look to the west and see all the way to the Mediterranean coast and sea. One can also see to the East the Judean Highlands towering above.

If a man should go about and utter wind and lies, saying, “I will preach to you of wine and strong drink,” he would surely be the preacher for this people!

The prophets were quite friendly to those who paid and fed them, but the poor had no chance before these paid prophets who,

...lead my people<sup>6</sup> astray, who cry “Peace” when they have something to eat, but declare war against him who puts nothing into their mouths (Mic. 3:5).

Therefore, God was bringing the unexpected and ironic punishment to them as well. Those who were supposedly enlightened would be in darkness. Those who were speaking for God would have nothing to say. Those who counseled for a price, who gave the good message of “God is here, all will be okay,” were going to witness the land destroyed:

Therefore it shall be night to you without vision, and darkness to you, without divination. The sun shall go down on the prophets, and the day shall be black over them; the seers shall be disgraced, and the diviners put to shame; they shall all cover their lips, for there is no answer from God...

Hear this, you heads of the house of Jacob... Its priests teach for a price; its prophets practice divination for money; yet they lean on the LORD and say, “Is not the LORD in the midst of us? No disaster shall come upon us.” Therefore because of you Zion shall be plowed as a field (Mic. 3:6-12).<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Micah refers to those he speaks up for and defends as “my people” (see also Mic. 1:9; 2:9; and 3:3). Micah refers to those he indicts as “that people over there!” (typically, translated as “that people,” *see, e.g.*, Mic. 2:11).

<sup>7</sup> Micah’s prophecy changed the heart and mind of King Hezekiah. In 2 Kings 18 and 2 Chronicles 29, we are told that Hezekiah removed the high places and worked to move the people back to a sincere and obedient worship of God. A century later when the prophet Jeremiah was on trial for making “treasonous” prophecies about a coming downfall of Jerusalem, the “Micah Defense” was offered on his behalf! The elders speaking on Jeremiah’s behalf quoted this passage from Micah, and noted that it caused Hezekiah to turn around:

And certain of the elders of the land arose and spoke to all the assembled people, saying, “Micah of Moresheth prophesied in the days of Hezekiah king of Judah, and said to all the people of Judah: ‘Thus says the LORD of hosts, ‘Zion shall be plowed as a field; Jerusalem shall become a heap of ruins, and the mountain of the house a wooded height.’”

Did Hezekiah king of Judah and all Judah put him to death? Did he not fear the LORD and entreat the favor of the LORD, and did not the LORD relent of the disaster that he had pronounced against them? But we are about to bring great disaster upon ourselves.”



Reading this line of thought, how God would take the sins of the people and turn them back on judgment, one wonders if this frames the thought of Rabbi Paul who would write 750 years later:

Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap (Gal. 6:7).

As we ask Micah's question, "Who is like YHWH?," we move from YHWH of the unexpected to YHWH of Justice.

### WHO IS LIKE YHWH: JUSTICE

Justice is a theme word in Micah. Repeatedly, Micah speaks of justice, both directly (Mic. 3:1, 8, 9; 6:8; 7:9) and indirectly. The Hebrew word for "justice" (*mispat* מִשְׁפָּט) has a wide variety of meanings and usages in the Old Testament. It can refer to a judge's sentence or judgment. It can be both a penalty and a privilege. But in the sense that Micah uses the word, it is properly translated "justice." Micah's concern, and that of YHWH, was fair and impartial dispensation of right and wrong.

Micah, like Abraham, understood God as the "judge of all the earth" (Gen 18:25). As Judge, Israel had a strong traditional teaching that God judged in righteousness. Psalm 9:8 proclaims that God:

... judges the world with righteousness; he judges the peoples with uprightness.

Similarly, Psalm 96:13 explains that the LORD,

... comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness, and the peoples in his faithfulness.

Micah takes up this fact, echoing Isaiah (or vice versa) with the promise,

He shall judge between many peoples, and shall decide for strong nations far away; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore (Mic. 4:3).

God was always Judge over the nations, including Israel. As Judge, God modeled a responsibility that was given to certain chosen people within Israel. At God's direction and instruction, Moses appointed judges with the explicit command that they judge fairly in righteousness. This meant implementing the justice and righteousness of the *Torah* ("law") into the life of Israel. "Justice" for Israel was

linked closely to the “just” law of God delivered to Moses. That law spoke to social issues and moral issues, as well as ceremonial issues.

"You shall appoint judges and officers in all your towns that the LORD your God is giving you, according to your tribes, and they shall judge the people with righteous judgment" (Dt. 16:18).

God himself raised up judges in roles that emphasized not only their decision making position, but also their role as protectors of the people:

Then the LORD raised up judges, who saved them out of the hand of those who plundered them (Jdgs 2:16).

After the monarchy arose in Israel, the time of Judges as rulers subsided. Under the reforms of Jehoshaphat, still 150 years before Micah, judges were again appointed throughout the land. They were placed in the fortified cities, like Moresheth (2 Chron. 19:5). The righteous king Jehoshaphat warned these judges that they were representing God and should judge accordingly!

[Jehoshaphat] said to the judges, "Consider what you do, for you judge not for man but for the LORD. He is with you in giving judgment (2 Chron. 19:6).

Somehow, in spite of this history, and in spite of the clear teachings of Moses, the judges by Micah's time were not interested in justice! Instead of justice, they made decisions out of impure motives. They were people who “hate the good and love the evil” (Mic 3:2). As a result, their judgments were not righteous; they were anything but! They did not straighten out injustice, but made “crooked all that is straight” (Mic. 3:9). Rather than uphold safety and integrity, Jerusalem was built with “blood” and “iniquity” under their watch (Mic. 3:10).<sup>8</sup> They gave their judgment to the highest bidder (“judgment for a price” Mic. 3:11).

These were a people who would have no defense against the Judge of the Earth. Micah uses terminology of a court proceeding as the Lord calls his case to trial against the unrighteous in Israel:

Arise, plead your case before the mountains, and let the hills hear your voice. Hear, you mountains, the indictment of the LORD, and you enduring foundations of the earth, for the LORD has an indictment against his people, and he will contend with Israel (Mic. 6:1-2).

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<sup>8</sup> Wolf sees this reference to being built with blood to either those perishing in construction or those beaten by their taskmasters. (Wolf, at 15). Either way, a righteous judge would put a stop to this!

God then calls his testimony forth, reminding the people that he redeemed them from slavery, brought them out of Egypt, gave them able teachers and leaders in Moses, Aaron, and Miriam, protected them in the invasion of the Promised Land, and revealed to them his savings acts. The response of the people was a pathetic idea that if they simply offered enough sacrifices to God, they could violate his every command about loving him, loving their neighbors, treating people with respect and fairness, and buying his favor. It is at this point that Micah brings forth the passage I used in my case!

What does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?

Neither Micah nor the LORD is moved by a religion that is selfish! It is worth noting that this passage was where President Jimmy Carter had Scripture opened to when he placed his hand on the Bible to take the oath of office!<sup>9</sup>

In contrast to the atrocious judges of his day, Micah declared himself filled with God's Spirit and power, with the result that he could properly declare judgment "with justice and might." That justice would come from the hand of the Almighty himself. It is God who will "judge between many peoples" (Mic. 4:3). God's judgment will not uphold the unrighteous decisions of the unjust judges. Instead, God will assemble those wronged, and assemble them into a remnant that would return to the land of Israel for another opportunity to live right before God in the land of promise.

In that day, declares the LORD, I will assemble the lame and gather those who have been driven away and those whom I have afflicted; and the lame I will make the remnant, and those who were cast off, a strong nation (Mic. 4:6-7).

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<sup>9</sup> President Carter then began his inaugural address quoting the passage:

For myself and for our Nation, I want to thank my predecessor for all he has done to heal our land.

In this outward and physical ceremony we attest once again to the inner and spiritual strength of our Nation. As my high school teacher, Miss Julia Coleman, used to say: "We must adjust to changing times and still hold to unchanging principles."

Here before me is the Bible used in the inauguration of our first President, in 1789, and I have just taken the oath of office on the Bible my mother gave me a few years ago, opened to a timeless admonition from the ancient prophet Micah:

"He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God." (Micah 6: 8)

See the full address at [http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th\\_century/carter.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/carter.asp).

God promised to bring out a ruler from a most humble town of Judah, who would protect his people as a shepherd his sheep. This promised Messiah is prophesied in Micah 5:2-5a:

But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days. Therefore he shall give them up until the time when she who is in labor has given birth; then the rest of his brothers shall return to the people of Israel. And he shall stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God. And they shall dwell secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth. And he shall be their peace.

This moves us to our last point of consideration as we question: Who is like YHWH in mercy?

### **WHO IS LIKE YHWH: MERCY**

In court I quoted Micah 6:8, from the New International Version,

He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.

Holy men have long seen God's righteousness entwined in Micah's combined ideas of justice, mercy, and faithful (humble) walking with God. Two thousand years ago, Rabbi Simlai preached a message saying,

Six hundred and thirteen precepts were communicated to Moses... Micah came and reduced them to three.<sup>10</sup>

Pope John Paul II frequently combined the two ideas of justice and mercy teaching, "There is no peace without justice, and no justice without forgiveness."<sup>11</sup>

Jesus himself used Micah 6:8 indicting those in his day who thought outward religious rules supplanted the need for genuine holiness:

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and

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<sup>10</sup> See the *Talmud* tractate *Makkot* at 23b-24a.

<sup>11</sup> John Paul II, and Leahy, Brendan, *No Peace Without Justice, No Justice Without Forgiveness* (Veritas 2005).

faithfulness. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others. You blind guides, straining out a gnat and swallowing a camel! (Mt. 23:23-24).

The Micah 6:8 passage calls out for justice to a people who used uneven weights in their market scales (Mic. 6:11), who would lie and deceive when it benefited them (Mic. 6:12), and who would make their riches with violence (Mic. 6:12). To them, God will dispense the ironic judgments we spoke of in the first section of this lesson (*i.e.*, those who wrongly eat their fill will “not be satisfied;” those who put away what they wrongfully gain will find it disappearing; those who manage to preserve something they put away will find a stronger one taking it by force Mic. 6:14-15). Yet even as God dispenses this judgment, he always has mercy waiting for his remnant, for those who turn to him.

Micah promises that the people will see God pass over transgressions for the remnant. His steadfast love will find expression as he faithfully fulfills the promise of redemption given to Abraham in the older days. In an interesting contrast to the Egyptian redemption Micah spoke of earlier, God will not simply drown Pharaoh’s army in the sea, but he will work a redemption that is much greater:

You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea. You will show faithfulness to Jacob and steadfast love to Abraham as you have sworn to our fathers from days of old (Mic. 7:19-20).

With this mercy in mind, Micah calls up the question of his name, as the prophetic book comes to a close. Micah asks,

***Who is a God like you?*** (Mic. 7:18).

The obvious answer? No one! There is no one who is like God! Consider it in Micah’s words:

Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity  
and passing over transgression  
for the remnant of his inheritance?  
He does not retain his anger forever,  
because he delights in steadfast love.  
He will again have compassion on us;  
he will tread our iniquities underfoot.  
You will cast all our sins  
into the depths of the sea (Mic. 7:18-19).

## CONCLUSION: WHO IS LIKE OUR GOD?

Micah asks the question in his name and in the words of his prophecies. Within the short seven chapters, we read of YHWH in ways that move us to proclaim with Micah, who is like him? Consider YHWH as:

- God of Israel (6:1-5)
- God of the nations (4:3)
- Witness to man's actions (1:2)
- Judge of man's actions (1:6-7)
- Savior from man's actions (5:2-5)
- Majestic in wrath (1:3-5)
- Astonishing in compassion (4:6-7)
- Worker of justice (6:9-15)
- One who promises forgiveness (7:18-20)
- One who scatters people (1:15-16)
- One who then collects people (2:12-13)
- Destroyer of Zion (3:12)
- The restorer of Zion (4:1-2)
- One who threatens nations (4:11-13)
- One who offers nations peace (4:2-4)<sup>12</sup>

For Micah's original audience, the answer to "Who is like YHWH?" is rather direct:

No one is like YHWH! Therefore, the nation and individual had better get with His program or else!

For Micah's audience today (meaning you and me!), the answer is not very different! We set out some of our answers in our Points for Home.

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<sup>12</sup> List modified from Mays, James, *Micah: A Commentary*, (Westminster Press 1976), at 1.

## POINTS FOR HOME

1. *“They oppress a man and his house... Therefore thus says the LORD: behold, against this family I am devising disaster.”* (Mic. 2:2-3).

God is the God of the unexpected! As we read in Micah’s contemporary prophet Isaiah,

For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD (Is. 55:8).

This cuts both ways! In one sense, it leaves a warning. We should never think that God has his eye turned from what we are doing and thinking. He cares for us enough to send his Son in sacrifice; he will never ignore us! But this warning is really a blessing, for we need a God of the unexpected. We need a God who, in the words of Paul,

... is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us (Eph. 3:20).

2. *“He shall judge between many peoples”* (Mic. 4:3).

God as judge should motivate us in a number of ways. Of course, we should live carefully before him, but this idea should be much greater. When we see injustice in the world, that image of God within us should get indignant. It is not right! The poor, the defenseless, the widows, the orphans, the small, and the weak should benefit from our understanding that God is a righteous judge! He calls us to such as we live in a world beset with climbing ladders off the backs of others. In this world, where lying for money, and where “sometimes you’re the windshield [and] sometimes you’re the bug,”<sup>13</sup> we need a reality check. This is a season of giving, but justice should never be simply a gift. It is core to God and his creation. Let us seek to treat people fairly, standing up against abuse wherever we see it!

3. *“Who is a God like you pardoning iniquity and passing over transgression?”* (Mic. 7:18).

Here, we have an interesting point. In Micah’s day, the people were not living justly nor treating others justly. They were abusing others for self-enrichment. The only time we see God acting in a way that is anything other than apparent justice is not when he acts unfairly to his advantage. It

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<sup>13</sup> Thank you Mary Chapin-Carpenter (“The Bug”).

is when he acts unfairly to his detriment! God has every just reason to eliminate this world and all its inhabitants. It is his love for his creation (read that “you” and “me”) that causes him to provide mercy. Yet the lesson of Calvary is that as a just and unchanging God, even his mercy must go hand in hand with his justice. Hence out of Bethlehem, came the promised Shepherd of which Micah spoke. This Shepherd would bring redemption and mercy to the people, but do so while satisfying the justice required by a just God. The penalty for sin was paid. A pure sacrifice was offered for the sins of those impure. This is the game changer. This is the mercy that those who have received are called to dispense to others. This is the life Paul has called us to, one of service in humility! Let us seek to serve those who need mercy, doing so in the name of our just and merciful God!

### **WANT MORE?**

Get ready this Christmas season. Find someone less fortunate than you and do something for him or her. When you do so, do not do it in your name or honor. Do it as anonymously as possible, simply giving the credit and glory to God and the Christ child born in Bethlehem pursuant to Micah’s prophecy!