

THE BOOK OF MICAH
Lesson 11, Chapter 6

I'll begin today with discussing some things to help make our Bible study and our application of what we learn more effective. One of the greater challenges we face as God worshippers seeking to study His Word, is putting aside the way the Bible has typically been taught in the gentile world of institutional Christendom for centuries. This way of teaching begins with tending to set aside the gritty realities of the humans that we encounter in the Scriptures and thus bypass the kinds of lives they were living. We tend to raise them up to mythological or non-realistic levels such as happens in the great works of the ancient Greeks like what Homer or even Aesop did with their characters. I even dislike terms like "Bible heroes" because it once again raises ordinary people to levels that seem impossible for us to identify with, let alone personally attain. Thus, when reading of all these different Bible personalities, we need to take them down from their pedestals and instead put ourselves into their sandals. We need to realize that their everyday issues of family disharmony, difficulties in supplying an adequate living, getting sick and injured at times as the norm, having emotional ups and downs, arguments with their spouses, having conflicting thoughts about what would be the right thing to do, but then bumping up against how that choice might materially affect them in negative ways, were what they dealt with just as we do. This means that when someone in the Bible says something or does something good or bad we have every right to ask what might have motivated them to do or think as they did? What was NOT said in the story is important, because when thought about carefully those unsaid but obvious realities of life reveal truth. These were real people, and not pure people. Their every decision was not altruistic or even necessarily righteous. They had their needs and personal preferences as we all do. They faced unexpected circumstances, struggled every day in trying to obey God, and these inescapable realities were what drove them more than anything else.

So, even though Micah was a great and true Prophet of God, he views things and thinks things and says things through the filter of his own life and life experiences. It all has a basis in how the world is from his viewpoint, at the time he speaks to them. But even more, none of these Bible Prophets were

professionals. They were not academically trained in the occupation of prophet, nor were they adept writers taught their craft by a literary expert. Certainly, they were literate to a higher degree than for the typical Hebrew. Nevertheless, they spoke and wrote in the mode of their day, in ways that were known to the general public, and pleasing to the prophet personally.

Micah stands out as having a most unorthodox way of speaking and writing, because that's how he thought. Most of the other prophets were much more consistent in whatever style they chose to speak to us; but Micah was anything but consistent. He writes in a kind of Hebrew poetry but constantly violates the usual and customary structure of it. He mixes literary genre in his writings from poem, to metaphor, to allegory, to simple prose. That makes his writings not only interesting, but a bit more difficult to decipher, especially for those neither living in his era or in his geographical location. And, it is doubly difficult for us, so far removed from him in culture and time. Let's continue today with that understanding, and I will continue to do my best to supply some of the hidden background and sense of his words that are not at all plainly apparent.

Open your Bibles to Micah chapter 6, verse 4, and we'll begin reading from there.

RE-READ MICAH 6:4 – end

After God asking Israel rather rhetorically, through Micah, how exactly He has wearied them to make them grow tired from obeying Him, He begins to remind Israel of their history that has everything to do with their identity and why they even exist.

CJB Micah 6:4 *I brought you up from the land of Egypt. I redeemed you from a life of slavery. I sent Moshe, Aharon and Miryam to lead you.*

There are 2 elements to this verse that are vital: **1)** what it was that was done for Israel, and **2)** who brought it about? Three times we hear God say "I" did it. God brought, God redeemed, and God established a leadership for Israel.

Once again, a more literal translation can be helpful than the somewhat dynamic translation method that is the routine of the CJB.

YLT Micah 6:4 *For I brought thee up from the land of Egypt, And from the house of servants I have ransomed thee, And I send before thee Moses, Aaron, and Miriam.*

Micah uses a technique that only adds to his repertoire of mixing various kinds of literary styles, but it can only be seen in the Hebrew language. Here a word plays as a means to rebut Israel's accusations against God. No doubt, this is Micah's doing in giving this message worded precisely as it is, (and in acting as God's authorized middle-man messenger). In verse 3 he explains that, indeed, instead of God "wearying" Israel (in Hebrew it is *hel'etika*) He has actually "brought" them (in Hebrew, *he'elitikah*) up to Canaan. Here's the difference of the YLT from how the CJB incorrectly translates another and different part of this same verse. First, where the CJB speaks of a life of slavery, "life of slavery" invokes a condition or a manner of life for the people. But, in the YLT it says, "house of servants". We'll find this phrase regularly substituted in the Bible as meaning Egypt. That is, Egypt's identity as concerns Israel is as a house of servitude and not freedom. So, Egypt and "house of servants" are simply 2 terms for the same thing. Further, the term "redeemed" used generally can be reckoned as meaning to rescue something or to exchange one thing for another (like in redeeming a coupon at a grocery store). But instead by using the word "ransom" it explains that what God did for Israel in Egypt required a payment. What was that payment? The lives of scores of thousands of Egyptian firstborns many of which (especially if they were children) were otherwise innocent of any wrongdoing against Israel. This is the kind of redemption that is the foreshadow of what is needed for the eternal salvation of people that comes through the death of the otherwise innocent firstborn of God, Yeshua.

Can you imagine a Believer thanking anyone else but God for our redemption (even though there are, admittedly, some large Christian branches that would have you thank the Church)? The Lord sees Israel as having forgotten from where their redemption from Egypt came, and who to thank. Rather than being a wearying, burdensome God, Yehoveh has repeatedly blessed Israel

with unmerited favor. He redeemed a people who in no way deserved it. They did nothing to bring it about; it was all Him and His grace towards His chosen people.

In saying this, Yehoveh ...inasmuch explained that He is Israel's leader. Yet the first thing that is done here is to say that He sent forth Moses, Aaron, and Miriam. That is, to send these forth means to anoint a leadership. Isn't this in conflict with itself? Surely no one would argue against the self-evident reality that Moses, Aaron, and Miriam were leaders. The key is that Yehoveh says "I sent". That is, the supreme leader sent others who were to bear the tasks of operational leadership for Israel based upon the supreme leader's instructions and principles. The supreme leader remained visible to them, and it is He whom Israel physically and tangibly followed in the form of the mysterious fire-cloud. When this supreme leader had something to say to the operational leadership He had sent and appointed for Israel, He would visibly hover above the Tabernacle and Moses (sometimes Aaron as well) understood the signal that they were summoned to come and hear what God had to say.

Therefore, in quite tangible ways, all three of Moses, Aaron and Miriam were prophets. They delivered God's oracles and instructions and warnings to the people. From here forward in the Bible a ministry of prophets began in Israel as a more regular or typical way of God delivering new oracles to the leadership and/or to the people. Prophetic ministry of this particular kind... unique to the Old Testament... only finally ended hundreds of years later with Malachi.

Moses was the one that spoke mouth to mouth with Yehoveh in audible or at least direct communication and dialogue. Aaron achieved communication with God in another way. Especially using the Urim and Thummim, he was given a way to get council from God in leading people in the ways of Torah and in worshipping God, but also as the chief administrator of the ritual parts of the Law of Moses. Although not perfectly stated, Moses acted as Israel's civil leader and Aaron as their religious leader. Moses and Aaron were brothers, and so was Miriam immediate family as their biological sister. This fact actually created quite a bit of trouble. Many of the other tribes and clans... even clans of Moses's own tribe, Levi... we most unhappy that only one family line in the

tribe of Levi could hold so much power. One of Miriam's main tasks was to lead the women of Israel in dance and praise, but also whereas there was non-male leadership of women needed over certain matters, it was Miriam at the forefront.

I should like to mention that quite interestingly; we will not find mention of Aaron in all the prophets that succeed him. Aaron doesn't really have his own separate story; he is bound up in His relationship with Moses and with the people of Israel. He served as Moses's spokesman but did not speak his own mind; rather, it was purely as a messenger of his brother. Other than the fact that Aaron was Moses's brother, there is no reason given for his eventual lofty status as Israel's first High Priest. I mean, what qualified him or what acts of merit did he do for God to choose him to be High Priest? For Moses, we follow his story from infancy and see why God selected him to be His earthly hands and messenger to ransom Israel from slavery to liberty, and to lead them to the Promised Land of Canaan.

CJB Micah 6:5 *My people, just remember what Balak the king of Mo'av had planned, what Bil'am the son of B'or answered him, [and what happened] between Sheetim and Gilgal- so that you will understand the saving deeds of Yehoveh.*"

Just as verse 3 asked 2 questions of Israel (what have I done to you, and how have I wearied you), so verse 5 has God telling Israel to remember 2 things. First, what the King of Moab had planned to do to Israel, and second, how the gentile seer Balaam responded to Moab's king, Balak. The ancient Hebrew sages recognized this as a well understood pattern first set down in the Balak and Balaam story. How Yehoveh dealt with Balaam in prohibiting him from doing what King Balak wanted done (to curse Israel), instead was seen as one of a series of righteous deeds that reflected God's complete loyalty to the covenants He had made with the Hebrews (from Abraham to Moses). He promised to protect them and He did. God obligated Himself to those covenants, and He fully expects reciprocity from Israel.

Here, once again, God addresses Israel as "My people", of course indicating that despite Israel's disloyalty to the covenants, those covenants remained

intact and in operation. If the definition of “breaking the covenant” as Israel did meant dissolution of the covenant, then Israel is no longer God’s “My people”. Israel is God’s “covenant people” as the Bible reiterates time and again. So, no covenant, no “My people”.

When the last half of this verse mentions “from Sheetim to Gilgal”, this is speaking about a section of Israel’s journey. Sheetim (which means Acacia tree) is to the east of the Jordan River, while Gilgal is on the western side. So, it reminds Israel that even during their journey to Canaan, God was protecting them AND blessing them. From a more general standpoint, this is more speaking about the large section of their journey on the east side of the Jordan, which then became a crossing over the Jordan into Canaan and another substantial segment of their journey on the west bank. Yehoveh is saying that He guarded over them and kept harm from them all that time, on both sides of the Jordan.

The final words of verse 5 are not put correctly in the CJB. That is, where it speaks of “the saving deeds of Yehoveh” what is said is “the ***tzedekah*** of Yehoveh”. ***Tzedekah*** means righteous, not saving. God says He did these things so that Israel will know God’s righteous deeds for them. In other words, His righteous deeds (blessings) for Israel were completely visible and commonly known... not hidden, and not difficult to understand. These deeds should have been remembered and brought to mind should Israel ever start to have doubts about God’s intentions and relationship with them. What a lesson is taught here.

How many times after God blessing us, protecting us, answering our prayers, forgiving us, providing for us, showing us mercy, do we encounter something really difficult and we begin to wonder where God is and why it isn’t fixed already? Why is He allowing us to go through this? Has something changed? This is like the proverbial “reed bending in the wind”. Everything is fine until something unpleasant happens, and then we begin to lose faith. We react in whatever direction the wind blows... sometimes in a good direction, sometimes in a not-so-good direction. That’s the sign of an unsteady mind and faith. The example as shown in Micah is that we are to remember those times when God did wonderful things for us and continue to praise Him even when things aren’t

going so well. And... the very last thing we should ever do is question or even blame God. If anyone in our relationship with God would ever be unfaithful or absent, it won't be Him.

CJB Micah 6:6 ***"With what can I come before Yehoveh to bow down before God on high? Should I come before him with burnt offerings? with calves in their first year?"***

The undeniable facts of history will not allow Israel to get off the hook or to deflect their own shame and blame for their attitude now. God did all these gracious things for Israel; it's recorded and known. This verse indicates that Israel responds to this reminder by feeling fully convicted so they want to know what they can do to remedy the bad position they have put themselves in.

I want to pause and share something that Nehemiah Gordon once wrote that is enlightening and appropriate for this moment in our study. I'll begin with a question of my own. Why is what Israel is hearing from Micah seen as new information? Did God change? Did the Torah change? Why haven't they remembered their own history, and have not been doing the right things? Why are they having to be taken to the woodshed when all along they thought things between them and God were fine and in good order? Perhaps the story of Josiah, according to Nehemiah, is the place to find our answer.

Josiah is a king of Israel who early in his youth developed a tremendous love for God and wanted to worship Him in all sincerity. Now that he is king, and the Temple is in poor repair, and he understands that God wants it to be in good condition, he begins to collect money not for himself but to give to the Temple authorities to make all the needed repairs and restorations.

Despite His heart for God, Josiah doesn't know that bringing an Asherah into the Temple is forbidden and so supports doing just that. Rather, he wants it there and even wants to beautify it. He's a late teen, he's king, he loves God, but he doesn't know any better than to allow a pagan Asherah (a fir tree as a fertility symbol) in the sanctuary. This custom of putting an Asherah into the

Temple had gone on since long before he was born, and he and no-one else in his kingdom thought anything of it.

But... one day those who were working on the repairs in the Temple stumble across a Torah scroll and gives to the High Priest. The High Priest brings it to a member of Josiah's royal court. Josiah hears it and begins tearing his clothes in a sign of shame and grief. Josiah says that although he was desirous of worshipping Yehoveh he didn't have all the information about how to go about it; what was permitted and what was prohibited. He didn't know that having that Asherah in God's house was actually wrong and a serious offense to God.

Here's the thing; as much as I constantly criticize the Church, it is quite full of well-meaning people. People who *do* want to worship and obey God. But they don't have all the information. Most of the information they do have has been corrupted by centuries of Christian dogma and manmade doctrines. And the Church often tells their members that whatever information they do need is found only in the New Testament, and from Pastoral homilies. This is what happened to Israel in Micah's day and before. Israel grew ignorant of truth, with some knowledge withheld, and in other cases truth was replaced with traditions. They only knew what they knew and didn't know what they didn't know. In those days, there was no alternative source of information than what the priests told them. This is why in the Old Testament we find our religious leaders as bearing the brunt of the blame from God for all the errors and lack of faithfulness of their people.

However,... for those of us in modern times, the equation is a bit different. No one desiring to know God and His truth is blocked from obtaining it. No one has to believe what the ignorant Church leaders say with no way to fact-check them. No one, no matter how poor, has to be without a Bible because they are available from cheap to free. Therefore, for modern people to be like the Israelites of our story, it comes from at least a partial willful ignorance. And for you Church leaders, you too can go beyond your seminary apologetics and minimal Bible knowledge without any barriers to cost or availability. Knowledge and truth are out there just waiting to be used.

Let each of us pray and be active to be sure we do NOT put ourselves in the position we are finding Israel in, in these Micah passages. They didn't even know how to make reparations to God! How can you avoid sin, if you don't even know what is sinful? How can you do right, when you don't know what right is? And the only way you are going to find out is to go to God and His Word and believe it over the many false or incomplete teachings you have lived your life by.

As we have God speaking with "Israel" during this dialogue, obviously there isn't a single person or a single leader or a single group that is representing Israel. This is like a posting on social media for all of a certain category of readers to read. Whether they do or not is another matter. So, Israel is present here as kind of an anonymous figurative person that is representative of the entire community. Thus, in verse 6, when a voice comes forward and asks: "With what can I come before Yehoveh...", this is yet another anonymous figurative person that represents all Israel. It represents the communal mindset of the people of Israel in general. One could certainly call it a strawman. The Bible scholar Francis Burkitt of the late 19th and early 20th centuries made this illustration and example from his day to compare to Micah.

This concerns "the earnest but ignorant settler in Palestine who knows nothing of the religion of Elijah and Amos". That is, there are very earnest God seekers who operate out of their ignorance having no idea that they ARE ignorant. And even though the God they seek is better reflected by the Prophets Elijah and Amos, these people know nothing of them or their faith.

The first question asked in verse 6 (what should I bring to come before Yehoveh?), demonstrates how very little they even know about what to do concerning something as basic as sacrificing. It seems to me that the way this question is phrased is that it is people asking the Prophet Micah what to bring as a gift. This may well be an actual response that occurred when Micah first began to present this prophecy. It also seems to me that while sacrifice would be the proper and expected answer, in fact the question is also phrased in such a way as to imply not a sacrifice but a gift of appeasement, the way one might approach a king or maybe even an offended friend. Even so, the truly

proper answer ...to what they should bring, is what they should *do*. Israel should have looked to Moses for the right response.

CJB Deuteronomy 10:12-13 ¹² *"So now, Isra'el, all that Yehoveh your God asks from you is to fear Yehoveh your God, follow all his ways, love him and serve Yehoveh your God with all your heart and all your being; ¹³ to obey, for your own good, the mitzvot and regulations of Yehoveh..."*

Beginning with the Law of Moses, restoring one's relationship with God has a definite sequence. It begins with recognizing one's sins, confessing them, repenting, and then with one's heart in the right place bringing the prescribed sacrifice as atonement. But Israel wants to jump immediately to sacrificing and skip recognition of their offense, therefore they can't possibly confess them, see no reason to repent, and therefore their heart and sincerity are NOT in the proper mode for God to accept their sacrifice.

As the next part of verse 6 says: So, how about I bring you a sacrifice? Would that work? And for that sacrifice perhaps I should bring you a yearling calf. How about that? Since the representative Israelites don't seem to know what their sin was, then of course they have no idea of the prescribed type of burnt offering to bring to the altar. This is a people who had much confidence and assuredness among themselves, and no doubt assurances from their religious leaders that they knew as much as they needed to know and according to that were doing everything right. But, in fact, they knew next to nothing and what little they did know was filled with error. This entire line of narrative only exposes them further for the faith-kindergarteners they were, and the charlatans their trusted leaders have been. As they continue in verse 7 their questions only make matters worse.

CJB Micah 6:7 *"Would Yehoveh take delight in thousands of rams with ten thousand rivers of olive oil? Could I give my firstborn to pay for my crimes, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?"*

There's only 2 possible ways to take what is being said, here. Either this is tainted with a sneering, tongue-in-cheek sarcasm towards Micah and God, or

this is truly an honest question of which the people would like an answer. I think it's the latter. I think the people are actually asking if the issue might be the number of rams and olive oil needed to get back into the good graces of their God. And, if even those grossly enormous amounts they propose isn't sufficient, would God finally see the depth of their sincerity if they offered what is usually the most precious thing in their family, their firstborn child, as a human sacrifice? At least Israel sees they are in big trouble with God, and they have characterized it as sin. But no mention of what they think that sin might be or that repentance was on their minds.

What is to be said, here? These Israelites had lost any sense of what mattered to God, what was acceptable to God, and what was abhorrent to God. By Micah's day, the people of the Northern Kingdom had for a long time been using a golden calf as their main worship symbol and said that it symbolized Yehoveh... probably it had been in use for 150 years by Micah's day. No one questioned its legitimacy. Naturally, this pagan and prohibited idol opened the door to accepting other pagan worship practices, just repurposing them for Ephraim/Israel to worship God in their own way. So, where child sacrifice was seen among the pagans as the greatest and most valuable sacrifice one could offer to their gods, then it seems that the people of the northern tribes of Israel adopted that thought as well. The horror and corruption and idolatry that we're reading in these words is about as bad as it gets. And still God calls them "My people". Still the covenant with Israel remains intact.

CJB Micah 6:8 *Human being, you have already been told what is good, what Yehoveh demands of you- no more than to act justly, love grace and walk in purity with your God.*

Let's turn again to a more literal rendering of this verse to add some additional insight.

YLT Micah 6:8 *He hath declared to thee, O man, what is good; Yea, what is Jehovah requiring of thee, Except -- to do judgment, and love kindness, And lowly to walk with thy God?*

When we examine the Hebrew, we see that whereas most translations say “man” or “human being”, the word is “**adam**”. Certainly, those English translations aren’t wrong, but there is a nuance that gets obscured. By using the term “**adam**”, it takes this message outside the exclusive sphere of Israel and into the entire world. **Adam** means mankind universally. Everybody. God says, I have already shown EVERYBODY what is good. Yehoveh has also shown EVERYBODY what He requires of them (of us). And, simply, it is to act justly, love grace, and to walk in the pure ways with God.

Christianity tends to highly water this down to mean to always act in love... but in whatever way you think love amounts to. The thought expressed in Micah is also found in the Gospels, meaning what we find in the Gospels is but bringing forward what was said and known long ago.

CJB Mark 12:32-34 ***³² The Torah-teacher said to him, "Well said, Rabbi; you speak the truth when you say that he is one, and that there is no other besides him; ³³ and that loving him with all one's heart, understanding and strength, and loving one's neighbor as oneself, mean more than all the burnt offerings and sacrifices." ³⁴ When Yeshua saw that he responded sensibly, he said to him, "You are not far from the Kingdom of God." ...***

God, through Micah, is referring to 2 things when He speaks of what already has been told to everyone. First, is that a moral sense is instilled in everyone ever born; that is, it is virtually in our DNA. And this moral sense goes by a few different names, but the most common is Natural Law. Natural Law meaning it is not a written-down moral code, but rather it is intrinsic to the nature of all human creatures.

When we speak of morality, this is a uniquely human attribute. No other creatures have a sense of morality regardless of their level of intelligence. Morality MUST be intrinsic in us, provided by how God constructed humans to be, or it wouldn’t exist. We are the place morality exists. Think of it: humans do not need a sense of morality to live and to function as living beings. There is nowhere a surgeon could operate to add it or to remove it, like he could our lungs or our hearts or some other organ or a limb. Morality is purely an

invisible God-thing. Therefore, it is logical that if the **concept** of morality exists as the common human trait, then the **definition** of moral living must also exist, and it must come from the same place that created the concept of morality; it must come from outside the human sphere of existence. The Law of Moses provides that definition. Without it, then humans are making it up, good and evil, as we go. And, of course, that is exactly what we see in the world. Even the Church has gone so far as to define sin as whatever the Holy Spirit tells you personally it is, thereby understanding that that same Spirit will tell others different things that are and are not sin for them. That is irrational of itself when we understand the very nature of morality *itself*.

Second, is that the moral code has already been given to us in detail by God, through Moses. The Law of Moses gives us the finer details of what is good, what Yehoveh demands of us, what acting justly amounts to, what loving grace is predicated upon, and what walking in the pure ways of God are. There is a source to find these answers, and it had been given 6 centuries prior to Micah's day. It was never held in secret, and so all in Israel and in the world in general who wanted to know, could know.

In this diatribe, God is essentially accusing Israel's religious leadership of being haters of good. Does that mean that their intentions were evil? No. It means that they sought their own definitions and that of their previous leadership to decide what good is. And the notion that having the authority to do such a thing had long ago become built-in to their society. It is interesting that the question "what is good" has been raised before and in other places in the Bible. And it is something we need to ask ourselves every day.

CJB Isaiah 1:16-17 ¹⁶ "Wash yourselves clean! Get your evil deeds out of my sight! Stop doing evil, ¹⁷ learn to do good! Seek justice, relieve the oppressed, defend orphans, plead for the widow.

CJB Jeremiah 22:15-16 ¹⁵ Your cedar may be excellent, but that doesn't make you a better king. True, your father ate and drank, but he also did what was right and just, so things went well with him. ¹⁶ He upheld the cause of the poor and the weak, so everything went well. Isn't that what knowing me is all about?" says Yehoveh.

Where do we find all this information about how to treat orphans, widows, the oppressed, to determine what justice is, and the right ways to help the weak? The Law of the Moses.

What Micah verse 8 just said, and what we just read in Isaiah and Jeremiah, are wisdom sayings. It is meant to inform all men in all ages just what it is that pleases God. It informs us of proper behavior and sincere understanding of what God wants... and the doing of it... and it is much greater than the offering of sacrifices. As it comes to sin and the conditions it causes, these are only ever needed because men do NOT do what pleases God. Therefore, if we walk in God's ways and obey Him, then this is far better to our Father than killing one His innocent creatures to offer up to Him to pay for what we did wrongly. And, Believers, if mankind followed God's ways and obeyed Him, we'd have no need for a Savior. Yehoveh wouldn't have had to allow the sacrifice of His own Son for our sakes.

The reality is that mankind will sin and will need a way to pay for it. It used to be animals. Now, we can rely on the once-and-for-all sacrifice of Yeshua. We'll continue next time with verse 9.