

THE BOOK OF MICAH

Lesson 13, Chapter 7

My wife and I were in Germany a couple of years ago, touring. I engaged in an interesting conversation with our quite knowledgeable tour guide, and the topic turned to WWII and how the German people managed to face the atrocities their nation had committed against the Jews, the Poles, and other groups. He told me that until the early 1960's, the people had not faced up to it. The government, however, realized that this confrontation with what happened needed to occur so that it would never happen again. Thus, it was over 15 years after the end of the conflict that the people of Germany began to deal with the magnitude of what had happened, as distasteful, shameful, and condemning as it was.

In an earlier Micah lesson, we talked about how King Josiah was happily marching along, continuing with the ways his people had been conducting both civil and religious matters for scores of years, when out of the blue a Torah scroll was found in the Temple that was undergoing repairs and remodeling. He had it read to him, and he tore his garments in anguish because he was immediately confronted with something of a great magnitude that had been covered over for a very long time. He was convicted that although he thought he knew God's laws and commands, and that what Israel had been believing and practicing for the longest time properly reflected what those sacred words said and meant, but in reality, they had not. In fact, some of things they had been doing were revealed as being an *abomination* in God's sight!

Now, in Micah chapter 7, the Prophet himself is under both national and personal conviction for believing wrongly about some important spiritual principles for entire life, and for totally trusting in the religious leadership and their long-held traditions and practices as being properly reflective of God's laws and commands, when in fact they were not. Micah is devastated.

Fellow Believers, you who are part of (or at least are examining) the Hebrew Roots movement, the same thing is happening to us, now, in ever growing numbers. Most of us are coming to a new realization after spending years, if not most of our lives, under the teachings, leadership and doctrines of the

Constantinian Church. For the longest time we didn't give it a thought or even remotely imagine that much of what we are hearing might not be the truth. This is how Christianity had operated for many centuries, virtually since its inception in the 4th century. Certain beliefs and doctrines became embedded and sacrosanct, and we all thought we were doing right. But along comes a revelation in our spirits that what we've been taught doesn't always match with what the Bible says. Now, we're unsettled. Soon, some of us developed a crisis of faith; not of faith in Yeshua or His Father, but rather faith in the Church and its leadership. Words and thoughts that had always been there in the Bible, we suddenly realized that for some reason we had never before seen or understood them. The impact was life changing, and we felt convicted if not angry at both the Church and ourselves for not understanding this before. Well, we're in very good, historical and biblical company. The challenge for us is the same as it was for the post WWII German leadership, for Josiah, and for Micah: what do we do about it?

The lesson I learned after several years of study and then teaching is that there is, and cannot be, any middle ground. At first, without consciously realizing it, I tried to walk a fine line between traditional Christianity and biblical truth, not wanting to fully let go of the one in favor of the other. It took a little while to realize it was an impossible task, because for God it is a matter of either/or, and not both. It is so well expressed in the simple words we find in the Book of Revelation:

CJB Revelation 3:14-16 ¹⁴ "To the angel of the Messianic Community in Laodicea, write: 'Here is the message from the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the Ruler of God's creation: ¹⁵ "I know what you are doing: you are neither cold nor hot. How I wish you were either one or the other! ¹⁶ So, because you are lukewarm, neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of my mouth!"

Very simply: be hot or be cold, be one or the other, because trying to find a common middle ground between two things that are very nearly opposites in too many instances, is to be in a self-created no-man's land. This place of being neither here nor there is not tolerance. It is not gentleness nor is it love. It is hypocrisy, delusion, and worst of all it is disobedience.

I finally gave up any pretense of believing that there was a secret tunnel I could crawl through so as not to offend either side. It has come with a cost, as you all well know because you, too, have experienced that cost. However, the level of peace that comes with no longer trying to find a non-existent middle ground is wonderful. Truth is wonderful.

If you will keep in mind all that I have explained to you as a preface to Micah chapter 7, then you will better understand where Micah is coming from and how he is feeling about it. Even as God's hand-picked Prophet, Micah is confronted with his own faults and folly, and he mourns not just over what he had been believing and doing, but what his nation had been believing and doing. They were in this together and always had been. But now there was no turning back. Discovering divine truth does that to a person.

We're going to move fairly slowly and deliberately through the opening words of Micah 7, because it packs so much more information than a rapid reading of it gives us. Open your Bibles to Micah chapter 7.

READ MICAH CHAPTER 7 all

"Woe to me", says the Prophet Micah. He is startled and crushed by what God has revealed to him. Micah was pretty much like all other Israelites of his day, and especially as they were in the northern kingdom of Ephraim/Israel, where the true biblical faith had vanished long ago. The difference was that something in him forced open the protective gates of his mind, of his traditional beliefs, so that he might be susceptible to hear the truth and have the courage to believe it and speak it to others. But, first, he had to face his own faults.

The word "woe" is the classic beginning to a lament. Micah cries and groans over the now-revealed condition of his nation (that of course bleeds over to himself) from God's perspective. And it is not pleasant to hear. At the same time, we, all these centuries later, can take comfort in knowing that to be a confessor of God's truth, even to the point of being a Prophet, it doesn't have to come from being an especially pure or faultless person. None of us who

preach, or teach, or spread God's Word are better than any other Believer. None of the Bible characters that we even call heroes were especially pure. It's only that as God seeks humans to take on the many different roles needed to build up and maintain a faith community, as He leads us towards our ultimate redemption, even Prophet is but one of those roles. The major requirement in any and all of these roles is simply to say "yes" when He calls. None of us deserve or merit having any role at all within God's Kingdom; it is given to us as an act of divine grace and compassion; it is not earned. At the same time, after coming to the knowledge of truth, we need to be open to continue to be taught, corrected, and remolded in a life-long effort.

What Micah exhibits is the way of repentance. Repentance is so much more than being sorry or sad. Repentance, by biblical definition, is changing direction. It is an action. We can't remain the same, and do essentially the same, only be sorry. As most of us have discovered, once we get on this narrow road through the means of Yeshua's sacrifice, the road becomes even narrower and tougher; certainly not wider and easier. And, not surprisingly, some go back to the wider and easier because of this reality.

I imagine that (as is typical for God's Prophets) the people of Israel who heard his words thought of him as harsh, offensive, intolerant, unfriendly, and judgmental. Some would see him as nothing but critical if not severe... maybe even a traitor. However, what we read is of the impact of God's words upon him and how deeply distressed it made him not just by the incorrigible moral condition of His nation, but of himself. We see this same kind of distress spoken by the Prophet Habakkuk. The first words of the first chapter of Habakkuk are:

CJB Habakkuk 1:1-4 *This is the prophecy which Havakuk the prophet saw: ² Yehoveh, how long must I cry without your hearing? "Violence!" I cry to you, but you don't save. ³ Why do you make me see wrongdoing, why do you permit oppression? Pillage and cruelty confront me, so that strife and discord prevail. ⁴ Therefore Torah is not followed; justice never gets rendered, because the wicked fence in the righteous. This is why justice comes out perverted.*

Habakkuk continues on for a while in this vein. “Why do make me see this wrongdoing...?” he asks God. Why have you opened my eyes to this uncomfortable truth that disrupts my life? I have been delightfully ignorant of the actual conditions all around me. I haven’t had to emotionally or psychologically deal with it, because, as with my fellow Israelites, all seemed fine in our relationship with You, God. Now, all that is ruined and I am suffering great distress. I ask you listening to me: is this not what so many of us have endured? Is this not what so many go through who are trying to graduate from childhood to adulthood? Things that were so simple and easy are now more complex and difficult.

Recall the final words of Micah chapter 6.

CJB Micah 6:14-16 ***¹⁴ You will eat but not be satisfied, with hunger gnawing inside you. You will conceive but not give birth; if you do give birth, I will give him to the sword. ¹⁵ You will sow but will not reap, you will press olives but not rub yourself with oil, likewise you will press grapes but not drink the wine. ¹⁶ For you keep the regulations of 'Omri and all the practices of the house of Ach'av, modeling yourselves on their advice. Therefore I will make you an object of horror, the inhabitants of this city a cause for contempt; you will suffer the insults aimed at my people."***

Micah is speaking as if the threats of those verses have now come about. And it may be that they have because it was but a few years from when Micah spoke to when Ephraim/Israel was attacked by Assyria, the kingdom conquered, and the people scattered. It has been noted by scholars for many centuries that although it might seem so when we read it, a Prophet’s words may have been given and then spoken in stages over a period of time. That is, it isn’t like Micah chapter 7 necessarily came within days of chapter 1. Years could have passed between his first words and his last. Let’s face it: it is most typical of human beings that while we might get shocked and upset when we understand the future impact of a prophecy, it is all theory until it actually happens. Then when it finally does happen, all the regrets and realizations of what that prophecy said come flooding in upon us all at once. But it’s too late to do anything but to suffer it.

I want to quote to you something the great German scholars Kiel and Delitzsch said about the opening of Micah 7.

The prophet responds to the threatening of the Lord in the name of the believing church with a penitential prayer, in which it sorrowfully confesses the universality of the deep moral corruption, and painfully bemoans the necessity for the visitation from God...

Although taking their typical ways of misusing the term “church” into account, what is fascinating is that on the one hand Kiel and Delitzsch see the institutional religious corruption of professing God worshippers, and therefore the necessity for what God is doing, but, they see that as something that is in the distant past, applying only to the so-called Hebrew “church”, and not as applicable to the Christian church. And yet, ironically, they have the right idea; it is only that they cannot see their own personal involvement or the modern Christian institutional involvement that they are part of, as being culpable.

After the opening “woe”, Micah proceeds to use metaphor and simile to explain himself. Using the standard agricultural symbolism so typical throughout the Bible, he likens himself and his nation to what little is left over after the harvesting of the summer fruits, grapes and figs. That is, even though by Torah law some of the produce is to be left for gleaning by the poor, it is as though even the gleaning has happened, and there wasn’t much to glean, and now there is nothing left. He is describing his personal emptiness, and that of his nation, upon hearing from God. Micah and Israel are as barren as the orchards and vineyards of his metaphor.

It is always helpful to hear from other Prophets to flesh out the intended meaning of whatever the Prophet were are currently studying is meaning. In Isaiah, we read this:

CJB **Isaiah 28:3-5** ***³ The haughty crown of Efrayim's drunks is trampled underfoot; ⁴ and the fading flower of its proud splendor, located at the head of the rich valley, is like the first ripe fig of summer- whoever***

sees it picks and eats it. ⁵ On that day, Yehoveh-Tzva'ot will be a glorious crown, a brilliant diadem for the remnant of his people.

And then this is in the Book of Hosea:

CJB Hosea 9:10-12 ¹⁰ *"When I found Isra'el, it was like finding grapes in the desert; when I saw your ancestors, it was like seeing a fig tree's first figs in its first season. But as soon as they came to Ba'al-P'or, they dedicated themselves to something shameful; they became as loathsome as the thing they loved. ¹¹ The glory of Efrayim will fly away like a bird- no birth, no pregnancy, no conception. ¹² Even if they raise their children, I will destroy them till none is left- and woe to them when I leave them, too!"*

Notice not only the agricultural references but also that these prophecies take direct aim at the northern kingdom. This is who Micah is focusing on at the moment. It's only that Hosea and Isaiah were further away in time from the eventual invasion of Ephraim/Israel by Assyria than was Micah, who likely witnessed it relatively soon after speaking the final words of his prophecy.

While some of these actions could also be construed as happening in the End Times, I think little of it is the case because the texts clearly speak about Assyria and Ephraim/Israel. Ephraim/Israel is not going to arise again and become separate from another Israelite kingdom. Any End Times mention of Ephraim in the Prophets has them joining with Judah, as a single kingdom, and never again to be divided.

CJB Micah 7:2 *The godly have been destroyed from the land, there is no one upright among humankind. They all lie in wait for blood, each hunts his brother with a net.*

A most interesting theme is brought up here that over the centuries found itself being approached by other great cultures. It is the search for one honest (or righteous) man. Here Micah longs for a single upright person not just among Israel, but among all humanity. So, the word "land" here is probably less appropriate than the word "earth". In Hebrew it is **eretz**, and it can mean

either, depending on the context. He realizes that even though the Hebrews easily recognize the corruption and perversion of the pagan nations, Israel couldn't see it in themselves. But now, Micah is so personally convicted and aware of his and Israel's condition, that he wonders if such a righteous person even exists? The Prophet Jeremiah asked a similar question.

CJB Jeremiah 5:1 *"Roam the streets of Yerushalayim look around, observe and ask in its open spaces: if you can find anyone (if there is anyone!) who acts with justice and seeks the truth, I will pardon her."*

Micah here zeroes-in on the northern kingdom and Samaria, while Jeremiah focused more on the southern kingdom and Jerusalem, demonstrating that this embedded corruption and lack of morality has overtaken both Jerusalem and Samaria, but as we learn, in Micah's day it was not to the same degree at the same time.

Who can forget the ancient Greek tale of Diogenes who, with lantern in hand, searched the earth high and low for a single honest man. And, in the world of the Israelites, they too watched and searched for that one truly righteous man, long after Micah, at first not knowing it would be in the form of their Messiah, and particularly not knowing when it happened that it turned out to be Yeshua of Nazareth.

Interestingly, the implication is that at one time the Godly did exist in Israel, and so did righteous men or that one righteous man. But no longer. In his day, Micah agrees with God's hard-hitting revelation that all anyone in the northern kingdom wants to do is murder, and to take what another fellow Israelite owns. Obviously, this is poetic hyperbole, but the message is that the majority of the people are dishonest, immoral, and criminal in nature and behavior. I think another possible interpretation is that the Godly among Israel have been driven out by the ungodly.

As we move through chapter 7, we find that the focus seems to remain as primarily the northern kingdom, and much less so on Judah. We know historically that many from the northern kingdom packed up and moved to Judah because of what Jeroboam and the succeeding kings did to corrupt their

Hebrew religion and as they tried to bar them from going to the Temple in Jerusalem. So, it also could be that Micah is speaking of 2 or more ways that it came about that Ephraim/Israel became so thoroughly corrupted, and those words aren't meant to identify a single factor or event. I lean in that direction primarily because of the poetic nature of Micah's words and the reality that those 2 things, and other things as well, occurred to cause the near extinction of the Godly in Ephraim/Israel.

CJB Micah 7:3 ***Their hands do evil well. The prince makes his request, the judge grants it for a price, and the great man expresses his evil desires- thus they weave it together.***

This is a good spot to bring in a more literal translation that adds some nuance to what the CJB is saying.

YLT Micah 7:3 ***On the evil are both hands to do it well, The prince is asking -- also the judge -- for recompence, And the great -- he is speaking the mischief of his soul, And they wrap it up.***

These Israelites now specialize in evil, not good. To do it with both hands means they are all-in. This wrong is pervasive and it is done deliberately and earnestly. When we tear apart this verse grammatically, a little modification from the usual way we find it in our Bibles is in order. Translators have known of this translation challenge for a very long time but tend to correct it according to some doctrine they hold. Whereas this verse seems to speak of princes and judges (2 civil offices), in fact that's an illusion. Rather it is that the prince is the name of an office, while "judge" is one of the things a prince does. So, it better reads: "the Prince asks and judges for a bribe". The ruling king or prince more often than not in Micah's era was also Israel's judge and jury. So, this is talking about payoffs. If someone pays the prince enough money because he asks for it, that will determine how he dispenses justice.

Righteous justice (***tzedek mishpat***) is always one of God's chief commands and concerns for His people and is nearly always a reason for God to lambaste Israel for not dispensing proper justice. We must understand that bribes to justice officials were normal and customary in the Middle East. It wasn't seen

as wrong; it was part of the accepted system. In fact, it must have seemed odd for Israel to NOT expect to pay bribes to the person judging a case, so despite Yehoveh's rules against it, they did it anyway.

The "great man" in this verse is actually in Hebrew *vehagadol*, which literally means "the great"; the word "man" is not there. It would be like we say, today, "the elite". The highest in society with money and power and notoriety. They are usually the only ones with sufficient money and influence to bribe a prince, and so the prince and the elite work together to pervert true justice. Another example of this is found in 1Kings 21, with the story of Naboth and the vineyard; so, this matter was a constant problem for Israel.

This verse also explains that the great man in collusion with the prince is how God's justice can be perverted. What the great man is doing, however, is simply what comes natural to him. He is used to being a cheat, a deceiver, and using his power in order to get what his evil soul desires.

CJB Micah 7:4 *The best of them is a briar, the most upright worse than a thorn hedge. The time of your watchmen- of your punishment- has come; now they will be confused.*

Stop and remember that it is an upset and totally demoralized Micah that is writing these words, so naturally the mood of the day is pessimism. He doesn't see much, if any, good going on as he tries to look through the eyes of a very angry God... now that he is so aware of it. So, when he says that the best of them (that is, the people of Israel) compares to a briar... a thorn bush... he isn't saying that there are those who do good, but they are still evil to some degree. He is saying that they are the least worst. That is, in degrees of evil, these are the people who are not as bad as others, but even so they can't be called righteous. Because this verse is a poetic couplet, then of course the same thought is repeated in different words; "the most upright are worse than a thorn hedge". They injure, and create discomfort, with all they come into contact with. What is left for a nation like this, but to experience God's judgment of wrath?

Israel's watchmen are the Prophets... the true Prophets, and not the professionally trained guild prophets who are for hire. The truth is that God sends His prophets both to warn of impending disaster, and then sometime after the disasters happen, to explain to His people what to do now. When God's judgment falls, chaos and confusion reign supreme. Nothing is as it was, everything that the people trusted to protect them has failed, and no one knows where to turn for rescue. In the End Times, this will be the state of the entire planet. Confusion as perhaps the most devastating result of God's judgment is spoken of in Isaiah.

CJB Isaiah 22:5 *For it is a day of panic, trampling and confusion from Yehoveh ELOHIM-Tzva'ot in the Valley of Vision. With walls crashing down, they cry for help to the mountains.*

Therefore, on the day it all happens, there will not be a Prophet to help them or to offer comfort or solution or direction because God will go silent for some length of time to His Prophets. Those Prophets who are alive during this judgment will also be affected by it; they don't get immunity. Further, the Israelite people hearing Micah will need to recognize that while the judgment will come in the form of an invasion from Assyria, in fact it is God operating behind the scenes and making it all happen. One of the reasons that this message of God causing the coming disaster is repeated, is so that it is clear that His prophets have not done it. It was the common belief in that era that prophets were empowered by gods to do things. If they predicted disaster, and it happened, it was the prophet that brought it about. They weren't entirely wrong; only in detail.

The Bible teaches that what God plans to do is already under way in Heaven; it just has not been transferred, yet, to earth. Therefore, the prophetic prediction is not something that is going to happen, in actual reality it is something already happening in the Heavenly dimension, so it cannot be reversed. When God uses a prophet to finally tell His people what is already a settled matter and is underway in Heaven (in some mysterious way), then those prophets' words become the dynamic energy, the power, that starts the clock ticking on our planet. It is not in the power of the prophet, but rather in the power that exists in God's words, that begins the process on earth. Like an

explosion that is set off, nothing can stop its awful effects. It is too late. While that is quite clear in God's Holy Scriptures, the Israelites had no doubt forgotten it because they had not operated around the principles of God's Word for generations. Rather, they operated around manmade traditions and pagan beliefs that had no power whatsoever, because those traditions and beliefs weren't the truth.

To get the proper sense of the meaning of verse 5, it needs to be spoken in conjunction with verse 6.

CJB Micah 7:5-6 *Don't trust in your neighbor; don't put confidence in a close friend; shut the gates of your mouth even from [your wife], lying there with you in bed. For a son insults his father, a daughter rises against her mother, daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law- a person's enemies are the members of his own household.*

I prefer the way this is translated in the YLT.

YLT Micah 7:5-6 *Believe not in a friend, trust not in a leader, From her who is lying in thy bosom keep the openings of thy mouth. For a son is dishonouring a father, A daughter hath stood against her mother, A daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law, The enemies of each are the men of his house.*

Verses 5 and 6 reflect the pretty standard parallelism of Hebrew poetry, and really the two verses should have been left as one long comment. When we read "don't trust" or "believe not" in a friend or neighbor, the meaning that comes closer in modern English is "don't rely on". Don't rely on them; don't assume that what they do will be right, or what they say will be truth, even if they might think that it is. There must be 3 categories of people being discussed in this verse, that are part of one's everyday life experience. Yet, when looked at in the Hebrew, the first 2 of the 3 use the same Hebrew word, **rea**. The issue is that **rea** has a wide scope of meaning from friend to companion, even to chief. So, we'll see that of these first 2 people that one is to not rely on but is translated to English in different ways. I suspect, but cannot be certain, that because the intent is clearly to include the total sphere

of one's typical relationships in general, then the YLT does it best calling out a friend, then a leader, and finally your wife.

Sadly, the high degree of sin and corruption had so infected Israel that it wrought havoc on all of Israel's society at every level. The entire concept of "relationships" is spoiled and disjointed. The wonderful human elements of friendship, comradery, and family have been disfigured. Where one ought to be able to put their trust in without question is now entirely and always suspect. We must do our best to grasp how this reality gripped Micah. His foundation was shaken. Why? Because God's truth that had just come to him had been held-up against his and his countrymen's beliefs, and those beliefs were exposed as sin.

Verse 6 delivers especially terrible news about the closest, most intimate of social bonds: that of family. But instead of closeness, a son dishonors his father, a daughter rebels against her mother, a daughter-in-law causes strife with her mother-in-law, and the males in the household become enemies of one another. We talked in an earlier lesson about how the Bible speaks of, and deals with, family conflict from beginning to end. Only here, family conflict has risen to the level of family having little more meaning than a genetic connection, while all else looks like the relationships between enemies, spies, and traitors. Everyone in Israelite society has an element of treachery, and so no one can be truly trusted.

All of this is what happens when people are confronted with truth. Some will embrace it, others will become angry and fight against it, and usually within the same family. Yeshua gave fair warning about what happens to those that hear His words and follow Him.

CJB Matthew 10:35-37 ***³⁵ For I have come to set ³⁶ a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law, so that a man's enemies will be the members of his own household. ³⁷ Whoever loves his father or mother more than he loves me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than he loves me is not worthy of me.***

In fact, I have no doubt that what Yeshua spoke here was meant as His direct response to Micah 7:6, because He did that sort of thing regularly. Whether in Micah's time or ours, this is an uncomfortable and at times heart-breaking reality when we decide to trust in God's truth, and to forsake the more pleasant ways of manmade religion. In a fallen world, truth causes strife instead of bringing peace.

As with finding family conflict throughout the Bible as a theme, so is the breakdown of societal fabric a theme. When God is not obeyed, normal and natural human bonds can't survive. Therefore, it is not surprising that this is a problem worldwide and not just within Israel. Even in ancient literature this is a common theme such as in the 8th century B.C. Babylonian Erra Epic.

A son will not ask after the health of his father, nor the father of his son. A mother will happily plot harm for her daughter.

Is there no hope at all for us? Yes, of course there is! And it comes starting with the next verse, which we will begin with next time.