

THE BOOK OF MICAH
Lesson 4, Chapter 2 Continued

We paused at Micah chapter 2, verse 6. Let's reflect on what we have learned so far. The previous 5 verses were a unit that together formed an oracle of woe. The woe is that divine justice is being delivered, with the world as witnesses, due to the injustices happening, and having become endemic, in Israel. The "why?" of it is straightforward: Israel was singled out by God to be His chosen people and nation. They were to reflect His truth, values, and justice. This arrangement was done by means of a covenant (a couple of them, actually). These covenants were made with Israel alone; the nations were not offered that privilege. Therefore, because Israel had the covenant, and knew the recorded terms of it, and had agreed to abide by it, then their repeated violations against that covenant... and bad way it reflects on God's holiness... amounts to rebellion against the Maker of the covenant... Yehoveh.

God's people, via living according to the terms of the covenant, were to be a blessing and enlightenment to all the nations of the world according to their first covenant; the Abrahamic covenant.

CJB Genesis 12:1-3 *Now Yehoveh said to Avram, "Get yourself out of your country, away from your kinsmen and away from your father's house, and go to the land that I will show you. ² I will make of you a great nation, I will bless you, and I will make your name great; and you are to be a blessing. ³ I will bless those who bless you, but I will curse anyone who curses you; and by you all the families of the earth will be blessed."*

God intended to bless all the nations by means of His covenant relationship with Israel. How? By being a light of truth to the nations. By showing them who Yehoveh is, how to live in harmony with Him, and ultimately showing them that obedience to Him and to His laws and commands were necessary for that harmonious relationship. The code of obedience they were to follow is found in covenant #2: The Mosaic Covenant. While God graciously lived up to every detail of those covenants, Israel failed miserably. This woe of verses 1-5 in Micah 2 is about the consequences of Israel's failure.

One of the enormously serious principles of the covenants is land ownership. Because God owns all the lands on earth, He holds the ultimate right to decide who legitimately lives upon those lands. He parceled out land for the nations and decided to give their leaders charge of it such that they might determine for themselves who could live there. But the Land of Canaan was different. It was set-apart to be administered by God, and He alone would make those determinations. He determined that land was for Israel. Interestingly, while people in other nations could legitimately “own” land in a fee-simple way, this was no so in the Promised Land. Israel was never to own land... only to possess it. They were as land tenants to God the landowner. But these land tenants were to have perpetual family rights of possession. They had no right to assign their land to a different possessor. And especially not a foreign possessor.

This oracle of woe is first of all dealing with the injustice of powerful and wealthy men taking possession of land that they had no right to. They were taking it away from the rightful possessors. So, the thing we have to notice is that the culprits who are the sufferers of God’s wrath are the evil-doers among His own people. This is not “the world” coming into Israel to take land; it is corrupted Hebrews taking land away from common everyday Hebrews because of the covenant- breaking crime of coveting.

CJB Exodus 20:14 ***"Do not covet your neighbor's house; do not covet your neighbor's wife, his male or female slave, his ox, his donkey or anything that belongs to your neighbor."***

This 10th of the 10 Commandments of Exodus 20 especially inherently includes the land that belongs to your neighbor. But the immoral grabbing of land had become a common practice among the Israelites. Isaiah had warned against this (and remember, Isaiah and Micah lived in the same era).

CJB Isaiah 5:8 ***Woe to those who add house to house and join field to field, until there's no room for anyone else, and you live in splendor alone on your land.***

So, these Hebrew evil-doers thought day and night on how to take what wasn't theirs away from their fellow Hebrews. And this forms the core of the crime that Yehoveh is in progress of punishing. This punishment would fall upon the entire nation of Israel... not just a few individuals... because the religious and civil leaders who are doing this represent the nation as a whole. And, in a like-for-like action, God would send another nation to take Israel's land away from them... including the land of the rich and powerful...just as they had been taking land away from one another.

Through verse 5 it was primarily the nobles and the wealthy who were the main culprits. But starting in verse 6, God adds Prophets to the list. Scores, if not hundreds, of Hebrew prophets were running around telling the Israelites that God was pleased with them, and their behavior was good in His eyes, and thus reward and abundance was their future. Micah was here to dispel such nonsense and lies. Yet, how were people to discern which prophets were the truth tellers? Each prophet proclaimed loudly that they were representing God and speaking for Him.

I cannot let this go by without commenting that we need to ask the same question concerning the more than 3,000 Christian denominations, each teaching a different truth, each proclaiming their truth is the real truth while the others are not. Today, especially in the West, the winners are the ones that bring the most pleasant message of God's approval forward and therefore draw the biggest audience. From teaching that Christians have no obligations to God... God only has obligations to them... to obedience being a thing of the past, and instead Christians have liberty in Jesus. Then to claiming that the Church is the new Israel, with the original Israel no longer the inheritors of God's covenant promises. And, that personal prosperity is the outward measure of our inner faith. Thus, the rich are just in their means of obtaining their wealth regardless of what the Scriptures have to say about it. And that is but the tip of the iceberg of the false, feel-good doctrines.

Micah and the true Prophets NEVER brought such messages of congratulations and validation of manmade doctrines overriding what was written. Naturally, those leaders and other prophets denounced Micah because they didn't want their lifestyles or authority challenged. Of course, among religious institutions

today, the same dynamic is occurring. Those who come to teach God's Word as it is found from Genesis to Revelation, presented in truth and in context, are denounced as heretics and cult leaders. This leaves the common people in a bind. God blames the mainstream religious leadership including these prophets who tell the people what they want to hear, for putting the common people in such a position. Yet, the people are not given a pass. They are responsible to seek God for the truth; but only a few did. In the 8th century B.C. (Micah's era) the nearly only way people had to learn God's Word was from the mouths of the religious leadership. In the 21st century, no such excuse exists. Religious leaders still bear much blame, but the layman has every means at his and her fingertips to consult God's Word.

Let's re-read Micah chapter 2, beginning with verse 6.

RE-READ MICAH CHAPTER 2:6 – 13

Verse 6 essentially boils down to this: the false prophets are telling Micah (and any other God-appointed true prophet) to keep quiet. They shouldn't speak because it is conflicting with their message of happiness and abundance. You can easily imagine that the largest portion of Israel sided with those well-accepted false prophets who gave them exactly what they hoped to hear. Depending on the Bible version, the final words of verse 6 are: "Shame will not overtake us". Jeremiah had a great response to this same state of affairs.

CJB Jeremiah 5:31 ³¹ *The prophets prophesy lies, the cohanim obey the prophets, and my people love it that way. But what will you do at the end of it all?*

God asks: "But what will you do at the end of it all?" I'm asking all of you the same question. You can no longer deny that the mainstream Church teaches half-truths and non-truths because it benefits them to do so. Yet, how will you respond to this? Hang your head and feel sad, but go right on with your worship practices and allegiances to those same institutions because it is so very comfortable and familiar? Or because your main circle of friends goes there? Or will you make a change and deal with the social consequences that are bound to happen? It's a lesson Israel had yet to learn, and it has been oh

so costly. It is costly to you as well, but perhaps you don't yet realize that cost.

Micah 2:7 says this:

CJB Micah 2:7 *is this what the house of Ya'akov says? Yehoveh has not grown impatient, and these things are not his doings. "Rather, my words do only good to anyone living uprightly".*

Let's look at a more literal translation.

YLT Micah 2:7 *Doth the house of Jacob say, 'Hath the Spirit of Jehovah been shortened? Are these His doings?' Do not My words benefit the people that is walking uprightly?*

This verse asks 4 questions of the hearer. First, it asks Israel if it is true that God has told them something. Realize that these are not God or Micah actually looking for a response. These are rhetorical questions and it is intended that the people re-think what they have always assumed to be true. From God's perspective, He already knows that in their hearts, the people are in a state of denial. That is, God is challenging the long-held beliefs that had been adopted by the Hebrew faith leaders and then taught to the people.

The second question asks if "The Spirit of Yehoveh been shortened?". I realize this sounds peculiar but the CJB's dynamic translation of "Yehoveh has not grown impatient" goes in the right direction, although falling a little short. Here, "the Spirit of Yehoveh" is essentially referring to the theology that is being taught and practiced. The term "shortened" comes from the Hebrew **qatsar**. It is used a few different ways, but here it is closer to a description of temperament. It asks if God's temperament and theology have changed. That is, has God modified some of His former positions and attributes? Has He brought His mercy and compassion to protect the vulnerable to an end? Has God reached the end of His capacity to bring about what He promises and commands?

The third question is: "Are these His doings?" In other words, are the constant troubles Israel faces, and their hope for new abundance and restoration of their nation as independent that never appears, *really* because God is causing this situation? That is, the people are not accepting that it could actually be Yehoveh their God that is causing this. After all, in their minds He is there only to bless them. He is there only to make sure they have an abundance. He is kind and merciful, only. So, even if it were true that the leaders and the people are violating the terms of the covenant, still God will overlook that and instead graciously reward them. That's the unique position of people who believe in the God of Israel. Everyone else may face negative consequences for their crimes; but we, Israel, won't. Sound familiar? Isn't this taught from nearly all pulpits? Join the Church, claim Jesus, and then have full liberty to go on living as you prefer because from now on you will never bear God-directed consequences for your trespasses. God is love only; never judgment or wrath. So, no matter what you do you are safe and owe God nothing. This mindset was false then, and it remains false today. But who wouldn't prefer to hear what these churches teach? That's what the false prophets were teaching, and the people ate it up with joy!

The fourth question is: "Do not My words benefit the people that is walking uprightly?" Here's the idea: walking uprightly is a religious Hebrew term that means obedience to God. It is always meant in the context of what is contained in the Covenant of Moses. Thus, indeed, those who are being obedient to God will have benefit. The unspoken, but inherent, opposite is that those who do NOT walk uprightly... those who are NOT obedient... can expect the punishments (the curses) associated with breaking the specific terms of the covenant.

There is a most legitimate question to be asked concerning this 4th rhetorical question. Is it God asking it or is it Micah speaking? David Freedman suggests that a better way for modern English speakers to understand this is something on this order: "Do not my (Micah's) words bring about good for the person who walks in the ways of Yehoveh the Upright One?" That is, it is Micah exhorting the people to listen to his prophetic words that truthfully bring God's Word to them, rather than to listen to the other prophets whose words are leading them into oblivion because what they say isn't God's words at all. In

fact, they virtually deny God's words and replace them with their own. Moving on to verse 8:

CJB Micah 2:8 *But lately my people behave like an enemy, stripping both cloaks and tunics from travelers who thought they were secure, so that they become like war refugees.*

The first word of this verse is **ethmul**. It's a little tricky to translate. Literally it comes closest to meaning yesterday. And, yet that doesn't exactly capture it. So, another common way it is translated is as recently or lately. Probably about the best we can do in English is "again, recently". That is, it has happened and it continues to happen currently. So, who are the people behaving like an enemy against? Against Micah? Against God? The way the verbs work I can say somewhat confidently that it is speaking of Yehoveh, and because people who do not obey Him are by default His enemy.

My people, is clearly meaning Israel. A theological question is: has Israel actually become an enemy of God? Or do they only behave as though they are an enemy of God? This is complex because the grammar more leans towards Israel being an actual enemy of God. And yet, in typical Micah fashion, we have imperfectly conjugated statements and a mixing of narrative with metaphor... so we have to be a little cautious in how to take it. I want to use an analogy to explain the sense of this. When we use the term "terrorist" it inherently in our minds includes the word foreign. Yet, in America we have also coined the term "domestic terrorist" as meaning a home-grown citizen who does terrorist things against us. That they commit acts of terror that one expects to be done by foreigners, yet domestic terrorists remain American. Israel is, in God's eyes, doing crimes that an enemy does. Thus, in one sense they are an enemy of God. And yet, these people remain as His people. So, Israel is being an enemy to God even though that isn't their intent. And, although they will be treated by God as an enemy because of this, still they are not being stripped of their heritage as Israelites.

What are the crimes of an enemy that they are committing? They are taking away from their fellow Hebrews the very clothes off their backs. Verse 9 expounds on the nature of these crimes.

CJB Micah 2:9 ***You throw my people's women out of the homes they love. You deprive their children of my glory forever.***

To repeat: God is not talking to foreigners. He is not addressing “the world”. He is talking to His own people. It is some of them who are doing these terrible deeds; and these actions are being condoned by other leaders and apparently by a goodly portion of Israelite society. Remembering that everything about this conversation hinges on it being in the context of a covenant relationship, then a good way to think of this matter is that an enemy of God is one who is not in covenant with Him. Or it is one who claims to be in a covenant relationship, but either has an animosity against that covenant or outright breaks its terms.

Here's the sorts of actions verses 8 and 9 are speaking of. They are not hypothetical; it is what is happening. The rich have become ruthless creditors, backed up by the religious leadership including the deluded and dishonest false prophets. They use robbers to go and take debtors cloaks away from them; this is referring to the poor who have nothing else of tangible value to offer as collateral than their own clothing. It was using violence and unscrupulous ways to collect debts. These thugs turn fellow Israelites into people resembling defeated soldiers that have been stripped of everything of value, including their clothing so that they go home in humiliation and shame. All of this is against God's laws and commands.

Women... in this case no doubt referring to widows... are thrown out of their homes. Children are seized and sold off as slaves in order to collect debts owed by their parents. They are sold off to foreigners who remove them from the Promised Land, thus depriving those children from learning about, and living in, God's Glory. God's Glory needs to be seen as a proper noun... a name. God's Glory is one of God's manifestations and it is the one associated with dwelling (or appearing) in the Temple in Jerusalem. So, this is saying that the worst part of removing these children from the Promised Land is that they will be taken away from, and deprived of going to, the Temple. Thus, they can't participate in God's appointed times, nor can they sacrifice and have their sins forgiven. And they may not even know about their own Hebrew faith.

Even in recent times, Israel's sins have only increased. Whatever excuse for their actions they may have had in years past (at least in their own minds), has caused this abhorrent behavior to become the societal norm within modern Israel and so it continues and multiplies. When that happens, the sinful nature of those beliefs and behaviors is removed and normalized by civil and religious leaders. Now, what God says is sin is so usual and customary in society that it goes unrecognized as sin. The end result is chaos and catastrophe.

Verse 10 says:

CJB Micah 2:10 *Get up and go! You can't stay here! Because [the land] is now unclean, it will destroy you with a grievous destruction."*

Or, more literally:

YLT Micah 2:10 *Rise and go, for this is not the rest, Because of uncleanness it doth corrupt, And corruption is powerful.*

Verses 7 – 9 were more or less Micah's defense or perhaps his proving to the people that he is the true prophet from Yehoveh, even though the leaders and most of the people of Israel insist it is the other prophets running around that are the righteous ones. He has pointed out the sins of the leaders and the people that are the core of what has precipitated God's judgment against them. And made it clear that all their troubles are not random or bad luck; these are punishments set upon them for breaking the terms of the covenant. Something they have stubbornly refused to acknowledge because the "invented" characteristics of the God they worship would never do anything but bless His own people and overlook their sins.

Upon verse 10, a severe and unmistakable punishment is being announced: Israel is being summoned to exile. They are to leave their land and to go into captivity. And this on account of the land being unable to bear any more of their corruption and defilement caused by their rebelliousness and sins.

The first words of this verse must have been so disheartening for Micah to proclaim, and for the stalwart of Israel to hear. It is a reversal of what was promised in Deuteronomy 12.

CJB Deuteronomy 12:8-12 ***⁸ You will not do things the way we do them here today, where everyone does whatever in his own opinion seems right; ⁹ because you haven't yet arrived at the rest and inheritance which YEHOVEH your God is giving you. ¹⁰ But when you cross the Yarden and live in the land YEHOVEH your God is having you inherit, and he gives you rest from all your surrounding enemies, so that you are living in safety; ¹¹ then you will bring all that I am ordering you to the place YEHOVEH your God chooses to have his name live- your burnt offerings, sacrifices, tenths, the offering from your hand, and all your best possessions that you dedicate to YEHOVEH; ¹² and you will rejoice in the presence of YEHOVEH your God- you, your sons and daughters, your male and female slaves and the Levi staying with you, inasmuch as he has no share or inheritance with you.***

The Promised Land was to be the land of Israel's rest. It was to be theirs alone, and a place they could live in securely. It was their inheritance, bequeathed to them by their ultimate father: Yehoveh. The Israelites, however, had become too much like the Canaanites that had been dispossessed of the land. The Canaanites practiced wickedness and idolatry, and now so did Israel. This was God's land. The very soil was being made unclean by Israel's sins, and God couldn't have it. So, they have been ordered out so that the land could heal.

The statement at the end of verse 10 needs to be seriously contemplated. It says, "corruption is powerful". Corruption *is* powerful because it affects others in a multiplying way. The term uncleanness is used here, because when we study the nature of uncleanness in Scripture, we find that it can be infectious. This sort of thing sounds like some kind of primitive belief, but in fact it is God's word to us. So, the Church has a tendency to not even consider uncleanness as real, or at least as something any professing Christian has to deal with. But the Bible paints it as a malignant virus. The corruption of uncleanness inevitably begins with the leadership. It is then seeded into the

community with false doctrines. The reality is that when humans turn away from truth, they do not adopt a higher standard because there is nothing higher than God's truth. Instead, they adopt falsehoods and fantasies that derives from the human mind. And these falsehoods and fantasies are always popular because they are based on what the people want to hear. Spiritual sensibilities become dulled. A herd mentality is formed. The usual reason people turn to false prophets is because of the unpopular nature of true prophets and the message they bring. Who wants to hear a Pastor or Bible teacher speak to them about sin and its consequences, or about obedience to an objective code of morality, or about a terrifying End Times that sits on the horizon? Very few compared to the majority. It was no different for Micah and for all of God's true Prophets.

Verse 11 continues with:

CJB Micah 2:11 ***If a man who walks in wind and falsehood tells this lie: "I will preach to you of [how good it is to drink] wine and strong liquor"- this people will accept him as their preacher!***

For a man to "walk in" wind and falsehood, is the antithesis of a man who "walks-in" God or God's ways. Wind is **ruach** just as the word spirit is the same Hebrew word. Therefore, some Bible versions use the word "spirit" here (if a man who walks in spirit). I think that's a misunderstanding. Rather, here it means the wind that blows. You don't know where it's coming from or where it's going to. It has no visible substance. It's changeable and uncertain. That matches well with its poetic parallel of falsehood. Thus, such a man who devotes himself to no discernable substance and to believing the false things that "wind" tells him, tells lies. Then is given a quote by a strawman who is representative of the class of false, but popular, prophets, as he speaks charming words of deception to a spiritually addled group of people who will gobble-up any lie or half-truth that makes them feel good. This man is a false prophet that woos them to himself by saying how good it is to get drunk... that is, to indulge in pleasures or ways that God forbids. And, since it is what the people want to hear, they happily accept him as an authentic prophet whose messages must be coming from God.

The rich and powerful did not want their lifestyles challenged, so these false prophets were encouraged to speak. As Charles Feinberg says in his brief commentary on Micah: **"Every age has those who are more eager for the plaudits of men rather than the praise that comes from God, and our age is surely no exception."**

CJB Micah 2:12 *"I will assemble all of you, Ya'akov; I will gather the remnant of Isra'el, I will put them together like sheep in a pen, like a herd in its pasture- it will hum with the sounds of people."*

Here we see a sudden shift in Micah's message from a warning of Doom and an oracle of woe to a message of restoration and redemption. Some Bible scholars believe that the final 2 verses of chapter 2 were a later addition because of this abrupt change. Yet, it is God's pattern in the revelation of prophecies to accuse, prosecute, judge, punish, and then promise a future restoration.

Verse 10 speaks of Israel being vomited out of the land... exiled. Verse 12 speaks of a regathering of the people. But this is not for all the people. Rather it is only for the remnant. Here's the thing. Which of the exiles Israel would suffer is this in reference to? Micah speaks to both Samaria (the northern kingdom) and to Jerusalem (the southern kingdom). Both did not get exiled at the same time by the same enemy. First the northern kingdom was exiled by Assyria in the later part of the 8th century B.C. Later on, the southern kingdom was exiled by Babylon in the early part of the 6th century B.C. Then, a third exile would begin in the 1st century A.D. and be completed in the mid-2nd century A.D. by the Romans.

Going by the newest exile first, the Roman exile of the Jews, that exile ended in 1948 A.D., a little over 75 years ago, when Israel was re-born as a nation of Jews. The middle exile of Jews to Babylon ended around 70 years after it began. The oldest exile of the 10 lost tribes of the northern kingdom began to be ended in the early part of the 21st century and is ongoing right now. Here's the point. The words of Micah 2:12 are very general in nature and intentionally vague because it would eventually prove it refers to *all* the exiles Israel would suffer. The Prophet Ezekiel in the 37th chapter of his book tells us that there

will be a full return of all exiles, and there will not ever be a 4th exile. However, these returns will consist of remnants only; not all.

Micah speaks of the remnant, although doesn't exactly define who it is comprised of. Ezekiel speaks of it as well, and gives a little more definition, but yet, not completely.

CJB Ezekiel 37:21-28 ***²¹ Then say to them that Yehoveh ELOHIM says: 'I will take the people of Isra'el from among the nations where they have gone and gather them from every side and bring them back to their own land. ²² I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Isra'el; and one king will be king for all of them. They will no longer be two nations, and they will never again be divided into two kingdoms. ²³ "'They will never again defile themselves with their idols, their detestable things, or any of their transgressions; but I will save them from all the places where they have been living and sinning; and I will cleanse them, so that they will be my people, and I will be their God. ²⁴ My servant David will be king over them, and all of them will have one shepherd; they will live by my rulings and keep and observe my regulations. ²⁵ They will live in the land I gave to Ya'akov my servant, where your ancestors lived; they will live there—they, their children, and their grandchildren, forever; and David my servant will be their leader forever. ²⁶ I will make a covenant of peace with them, an everlasting covenant. I will give to them, increase their numbers, and set my sanctuary among them forever. ²⁷ My home will be with them; I will be their God, and they will be my people. 28 The nations will know that I am YEHOVEH, who sets Isra'el apart as holy, when my sanctuary is with them forever.'"***

Micah uses the metaphor of the returning remnant as sheep in a pen. Ezekiel uses the metaphor of the returning remnant by staying in the same sheep motif of Micah, saying that all of them will have one shepherd (My servant David). So, they will not be put back into the land as sheep without a shepherd. And yet, history shows us that of the 3 fulfillments, only in the final one is there a shepherd over all Israel. Ezekiel speaks of Israel having been split into 2 kingdoms (Judah and Ephraim/Israel). Each of the 3 exiles only

dealt with 1 or the other of the 2 kingdoms (the first exile only of Ephraim/Israel, and the second and third only of Judah). But Ezekiel's final return deals with them both; all 12 tribes. And this return is well underway as I speak this lesson to you. What remains, then, is for the appearance of their shepherd, David.

Verse 13 completes chapter 2.

CJB Micah 2:13 *The one breaking through went up before them; they broke through, passed the gate and went out. Their king passed on before them; Yehoveh was leading them.*

Micah's tendency to drift in and out of poetry is clear. Verses 12 and 13 are among his most poetic. The speaker is Yehoveh. In verse 12, the words "sheep in a pen" are sometimes translated as "sheep in Bozrah". Bozrah means sheep pen. However, there were 3 different towns in the Old Testament that had the name of Bozrah, meaning they were sheep shearing centers. So, it is not possible to know whether we should take the word as used here to just generically mean a pen for sheep, or as the name of a town.

Who or what is the breaker? First, it is message of a hope for the future. The breaker is a leader. That this leader goes before them, is I think, meant to remind them of the fire-cloud on the wilderness journey. The Hebrew of the exodus knew this fire-cloud was a manifestation of God; and so, it is appropriate to think of this breaker as a manifestation of God. Because of the poetic nature of this verse, then we are to understand that the breaker, their king, and Yehoveh were alternate names for the same thing. Yehoveh is the breaker and king, but He is coming in the manifestation of His agent-son, the Messiah.

God is not done with Israel. The Breaker is coming to lead them and save them. Israel just doesn't understand that His coming is actually a return. But, in time, they will.

We'll begin chapter 3 next time.