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Micah 6:1-8 (Exegesis)

I. Historical Background

The book of Micah was written by the prophet Micah. Tucker states that the name Micah is "a shortened form of the name Micaiah" (632) and means "who is like Yahweh?" (Hill 343). "Etymologically the name is an expression of praise to the God who is incomparable" (Tucker 633). Harris documents in his article on "Micah" that this name is attributed to six people in the Old Testament, including the canonical prophet from Moresheth (646).

The superscription in the book of Micah (1:1) acknowledges its author: "the word of the Lord which came to Micah of Moresheth . . ." (NASB). It is not certain whether the prophet lived in Moresheth or whether he lived in Jerusalem and was named after the town from which he came, but Craigie believes the latter is more probable (*Old Testament* 190). Micah was probably not a professional prophet who was paid for his services since he criticizes prophets who "divine for money" (Mic. 3:11 NASB) or "tailor their message according to how they are treated (v. 5)" (LaSor et al. 357). According to Helmbold, "Micah was a man of courage, conviction, and rare personal faith . . . [whose] main concern was the social injustice prevalent in his day" (214-15). Unger states that according to Pseudo-Epiphanius, Micah rebuked Jehoram for his impieties and was therefore "thrown from a precipice and buried at Morathi, in his own country, near the cemetery of Enakim" (848). After much historical study, Bright concluded that "we know little of Micah save that he came from the village of Moresheth-gath in southwestern Judah (Micah 1:1), and that his ministry began approximately when Isaiah's did and continued into the reign of Hezekiah (cf. Jer. 26:16-19)" (293).

Almost universally, chapters 1-3 have been accepted as genuine oracles of Micah, but some questions have arisen over the time frame of the speeches in chapters 4-7, primarily because of a reference to Babylon. However, Hezekiah's alliance with Merodach-baladan (2 Kings 20:12-19) seems to indicate that the ancient city was also prominent in Micah's day (LaSor et al. 358). Harris, in his article on the "Book of Micah," further supports that Babylon was a "menace" even in Micah's day according to Is. 39:6 and also by Assyrian testimony (647). Conservative scholars, who believe in the supernatural, see no problem with Micah's prediction of the future Babylonian captivity for Judah (Mic. 4:10).

In the past century, some biblical scholars have denied the authenticity of the passages concerning Judah's future hope and have limited Micah's role to preaching doom. However, recently scholars have recognized that the prophets proclaimed both doom and hope and have aptly stated that "the prophets were creative thinkers, inspired by the Spirit of the Lord and under control of the word which they received--a word of both judgment and grace" (LaSor et al. 359). While it cannot be determined that Micah himself wrote down each of his oracles, there is little reason to doubt that the book is a genuine product of Micah's prophecy in the eighth century B.C. (Harrison 925).

Although most scholars agree that the prophet Micah was the author of the book that bears his name, they do not agree as to the exact dates of his ministry. Bullock summarizes the

four main scholarly views concerning the dates of Micah's ministry. First, some "confine his activity to the period before the fall of Samaria." Second, "some believe . . . Micah's ministry commenced before the fall of Samaria . . . and it concluded sometime after the great crisis." Third, others say that his focus revolved around Sennacherib's invasion of 701 B.C. Fourth, this writer and "others have taken quite seriously the superscription" of Micah 1:1 that clearly states that he prophesied "in the days of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah" (NASB). Potentially, Micah may have prophesied during a 50 year span from the 739 - 686 B.C. (106 - 107).

Conservative scholars agree that Micah's ministry began prior to the Assyrian destruction of Israel's capital since Micah "predicts the fall of Samaria as well as the destruction of Jerusalem" (Schultz 395). Harrison concurs, "since Samaria was threatened in Micah 1:6, the date of the first oracle (Mic. 1:2-7) must be in advance of 722 B.C." (922). Archer offers more support for this early date: "Since Israel is addressed in Micah 6 as if it were still capable of escaping divine judgment through a last-minute repentance, it may be fairly deduced that Micah commenced his ministry at least before the fall of Samaria in 722 (322).

While the oracles or chapter 1 took place during the reign of Jotham (739 - 731 B.C.), McComiskey mentions that the discourses in chapters 2-5 probably occurred during the time of Ahaz (735-716) and the early period of Hezekiah (715-686), since Samaria is not mentioned ("Book of Micah" 344). Since Micah does not mention the Northern kingdom's fall, Bullock suggests that Micah was "[absent] from the public view during the latter years of the reign of Ahaz." Bullock further suggests that Micah probably renewed his prophetic ministry "prior to Sennacherib's invasion of 701" (107). Tucker notes that Jer. 29:18 is the only external reference to Micah that verifies that he came to Jerusalem during the reign of Hezekiah ("Book of Micah" 633). Archer concludes that there is no certain evidence as to when his ministry ceased (322). Keil states that "Micah's prophecies were committed to writing in the time of Hezekiah," but that this does not imply that he did not utter them before this time (420).

Since both Israel and Judah had sinned against God and angered Him, Micah proclaimed a message of judgment against Yahweh's people (Longman 651). "Micah directed his message to the leaders of Judah (3:1,9) . . . [and] aimed his indictment at the people themselves" (Bullock 105). Craigie states that Micah addressed several concerns: the powerful taking advantage of the poor, the courts being corrupted, and rulers and religious leaders failing in their duties (*Twelve* 3).

II. Contextual Analysis

Micah 6:1-8 begins the third section of the book with an indictment against the people of Israel. Commentators have divided the book of Micah into three divisions, each beginning with the word "Hear" (1:2, 3:1, 6:1), and each opening "with an oracle of doom" and closing "with an oracle of hope" (Bullock 117). McGee states that while the first division is addressed to "all people" and the second division is addressed to Israel's leaders, the third division is "a personal word pleading to Israel to repent and return to God" (83). Micah boldly proclaims that God's judgment is inevitable because of Israel's persistent sinning as he confronts them with their sins; yet, he ends each discourse with a note of restoration (Fink 1734).

In Micah 6:1-8, the mountains are called as witnesses in a court room to hear the accusation the Lord has against his people. In Micah 6:9-16, God's indictment becomes more specific in this oracle of judgment. In Micah 7:1-7, a complaint is made by an individual that

pictures the treachery and oppression of his countrymen. Micah 7:8-16 finishes the third division of the book with a word of hope, reminding Israel of God's uniqueness (LaSor et al. 363-4).

"In the form of a judicial contest between the Lord and His people, the prophet holds up before the Israelites their ingratitude for the great blessings which they have received from God (vers. 1-5), and teaches them that the Lord does not require outward sacrifices to appease His wrath, but righteousness, love and humble walk with God (vers. 6-8)" (Keil 492).

In verse 1 the Lord challenges Israel to plead their case before the mountains and the hills. God is the judge, and Micah is His counsel speaking on His behalf. Craigie believes that the counsel calls upon the mountains and the hills metaphorically (*Twelve* 45). "The mountains and the hills are the best witnesses, because from their heights they have seen the sins of the people; their sins had often been committed in 'the highest places'" (Alfaro 65). Smith confirms that the jury consists of the mountains and hills "because they have been around a long time and have witnessed God's dealing with Israel" (50). Additionally, in verse 2, the enduring foundations (מַסְדֵּי in Hebrew) are called as witnesses (Armstrong 384). Walke believes that the mountains are called everlasting foundations to "emphasize that they are the oldest parts of the earth and as such can best serve as witnesses" (193). McComiskey further confirms in "Micah" that "the appeal to the mountains should be understood simply as an entreaty to witnesses that have been in existence throughout Israel's history" (434).

The Lord introduces His dispute with Israel in verse 2 as He asks the court of witnesses who heard Israel's case to listen to His "indictment" (NASB). The Hebrew word for indictment, בִּיָּד, is also translated as "accusation" (NIV) and "controversy" (RSV) and means "strife, contention" (Wilson 95), and in its context means "(legal) dispute, case, lawsuit" (Holladay 338). Kelley states that the latter part of verse 2, translated "he will contend with Israel" (RSV) should be translated "he will plead with Israel." This verb implies a pleading or reasoning with someone; thus, "the Lord's appeal to reason shows that he spoke not in anger but in love" (41).

The Lord opens His case with a question, in verse 3, implying that His charge is that "Israel has grown tired of God and [has] chosen to go its own way" (Craigie, *Twelve* 45). In verses 4-5, the Lord reminds Israel of His faithfulness toward them and the benefits that He bestowed upon them. Since Israel cannot deny these gracious acts of God, they inquire of the prophet what would repair the bond of fellowship that has been lost by their sin (Keil 495). In verses 6-7, Micah assures them that sacrifices are not the answer. "The best one could offer--even the first born, which is the most precious gift one could give--is not acceptable for the sin of one's soul" (Schultz 399).

Micah 6:8 uses three words that describe God's expectations of his people, and thus, the areas in which they have fallen short and sinned. The word for justice is טִפְשָׁה, which means "rightness rooted in God's character [that] ought to be an attribute of man" (Harris, *Theological* 949). Justice is God's attribute that He requires of man and Prov. 21:15 says it is the joy of the righteous (Brown 1048). The word חַסְדֵּי, means a "kindness of men towards men, in doing favours and benefits ... (especially as extended to the lowly and miserable) (Brown 338). The word for humble, עֲנָוָה, as in "walk humbly with your God" (NASB) means "to be lowly, submissive, modest" (Wilson 223). These three words describe God's requirements of man and provide the central theme to the book of Micah and the Old Testament.

III. Theological Reflections

The focus of Micah 6:1-8 is a broken relationship between God and His people and the means to restore this relationship. God's covenant faithfulness toward Israel is contrasted with Israel's lack of faithfulness toward God in a lawsuit. To mend this relationship Micah shares what God requires of Israel, thus describing the purpose of life for mankind.

"Micah's God is clearly the God of the Sinaitic covenant. The power, righteousness, and high morality that motivates God's appearance to the Israelite tribes at Mt. Sinai were at the forefront of his prophetic message" (Hill 346). In verses 4 and 5, Israel is reminded that God kindly redeemed them from Egypt and brought them victoriously from Shittim, "the last encampment of the Israelites on the eastern side of the Jordan River", to Gilgal, "the first major encampment on the western side" in the promised land (Bullock 120). Micah "imagined Yahweh entering his case against his people, who had forgotten his gracious acts toward them in the past, and also that his demands--which are just and merciful behavior and humble obedience--cannot possibly be satisfied by any conceivable heightening of cultic activity" (Bright 294). Henry infers that since Israel is plainly guilty in the trial, being "convicted of injustice and ingratitude towards God, . . . they express their desires to be at peace with God upon any terms (v. 6, 7)" (1046).

Fink comments well on verses 6 and 7 expressing that the people are trying to obtain God's favor through "external formalities." If quality is what God desires, then they will offer the best burnt offering. If quantity is what God desires, then they will offer thousands of rams or ten thousand rivers of oil. If human sacrifice is what God desires, then they will offer their precious first-born child. Fink strongly concludes that "none of these will secure Jehovah's favor, for all are external and stem from a wrong motive and a false understanding of Jehovah" (1747).

Micah realized that his nation had lost the essence of the faith. "Ritual had become an end in itself, not an external manifestation of the nation's primary relationship with God" (Craigie, *Twelve* 47). "Micah contrasts external religious acts (sacrifices) with inward religious attitudes (justice, mercy, humility). . . . Most scholars now admit that Micah was not attacking the sacrificial system itself, but the conviction that external religious acts without inward piety can establish a right relationship with God" (Longman 657).

Bullock argues that the "prophetic theology in 6:8 countermanded the foggy notions of social righteousness and perverted religious piety that the community intoned" (122). Helmbold shows that Micah summarizes in verse 8 the preaching of three famous prophets of his time: Amos spoke of justice (Amos 5:24), "Hosea spoke of God's unfailing mercy (Hos. 6:6), while Isaiah called upon his people to live in communion with Yahweh (Isa. 6:5)" (216). Bullock aptly explains the three things that God requires and considers good and pleasing:

"Justice" (mishpat) is a term that comprehends the covenant responsibilities, whereas "kindness" (hesed) is the duty of man to man, which grows out of Yahweh's gracious love expressed in His covenant relationship to mankind. "To walk humbly" with God is to maintain communion with Him (122).

Fink sees God's requirements in three dimensions: outward, inward, and upward:

Outwardly, **to do justly** necessitates dealing righteously with one's fellow man. Inwardly, **to love mercy** (Heb chesed, covenant loyalty) necessitates having the inward commitment to God's revelation that will manifest itself in a right relationship towards man and God. Upward, **to walk humbly with thy God** necessitates having a right attitude towards God and a determination to walk in

continuous fellowship with Him (1748).

"To walk with God" not only involves obedience towards God, but also "implies constant prayer and watchfulness, familiar yet humble converse with God (Gen. 5:24; 17:1)" (Jamieson 818). In Matt. 23:23 and Luke 11:42, Jesus describes what truly pleases God by referencing the three elements Micah proclaimed in 6:8.

To be "pleasing" to God is the purpose of life and the reason mankind was created (Rev. 4:11). Jesus Christ lived as the perfect man, pleasing God in every way and thus fulfilling the purpose of life (John 8:29). Heb. 11:6 says that "without faith it is impossible to please God" (NASB). Yet, all men are born with a sinful nature and do not naturally desire to seek and serve God (Rom. 3:11,23). Therefore, Christ died for us that we should no longer live for ourselves, but to live to please Him (2 Cor. 5:15). By an act of grace of God's Spirit, we can have a changed nature that desires to please God (2 Cor. 5:19).

Out of gratitude for God saving us and changing us as a result of putting our trust in Jesus' sacrifice on the cross, we want to live a life that is pleasing to our Savior. According to McComiskey, "the ethical requirements of v. 8 do not comprise the way of salvation," since forgiveness of sin was received through the sacrifices ("Micah", 436). The standards of verse 8 are for those who were already a part of the covenant community and the verse explains the response that God would like of those who were in this community. McComiskey further states that these "standards have not been abrogated for Christians, for the NT affirms their validity." Caldwell states, "No one can **act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly** and fail to please God. Before these conditions can be met, every person must seek peace with, and forgiveness from, God" (770).

IV. Contemporary Application

Believers in God throughout the world often reflect on the purpose of life and whether each of their lives is pleasing to God. Some people think that God has abandoned them and mistreated them and use this to justify their ungodly lifestyle. Others come to the realization that God is faithful and just and that it is they who have broken fellowship with God. After remorsefully seeing the state of their short comings, some try to mend the relationship with God on their own terms, while others mend the relationship on God's terms.

When people encounter trials and problems in life, they often ask why a loving God would let these disasters happen to them. Because they feel that God has been unfaithful and unkind to them, they feel that they are under no obligation to serve Him. If they could only see the grand master plan in the spiritual realm, they would find out that every good thing comes from God and that He is not the cause of their perceived problems. Instead, God is as faithful, kind, and patient to His children today as He has proven Himself to be to those in the Old and New Testament days. In a court room, God's case against His unfaithful people would surely have ample support to convict them of their ingratitude and erring ways.

The natural response to conviction by the Holy Spirit is to ask, "how can a sinful man approach God?" What would appease His wrath and even make Him delighted? Without waiting to hear from God or his Word for the answer to these questions, many people come up with their own ideas to mend the relationship. When faced with their own short comings, people have a tendency to engage in religious activity such as attending church, reading the Bible, and giving money to God and others. If these "spiritual" activities do not give them a sense of satisfying God, then they will attempt to do more of these activities in hopes to please God and

to remove the guilt that they feel from a strained relationship. Although they may be sincere in their thinking, they tend to be sincerely wrong. This does not mean that these activities are bad, but that external religious activities without an inward harmonious relationship with God is useless.

The first step towards pleasing God is coming into a right relationship with God. The New Testament, which gives a more complete revelation of God's redemption plan, says that people must repent and have faith in Christ Jesus in order to be "born again" and allow the Spirit of God to rule and reign in their hearts. After having this internal experience, it is natural for them to seek the Lord and His Word for guidance in living a life that is pleasing to their Creator and Redeemer. God's written Word as spoken by the prophet Micah reveals three essential elements in pleasing God.

First, people must "walk humbly with God," which presupposes that they have come into a right relationship with God and have experienced the forgiveness of sins that is offered through the shed blood of Jesus. God desires a love relationship with His children just as a loving father does with his biological children. In order to develop this relationship and to become more intimate with God, believers must spend time conversing with Him through prayer and by reading the Bible. As believers spend more time with God, they know Him better, trust Him more, and love Him sincerely. Out of the believers' love relationship, he will desire to humble himself and walk in His righteous ways.

Second, believers who desire to obey God, seek to do justice. God is pleased when believers are fair and honest in all their dealings with other people. Justice implies doing what is right. Believers are greatly benefited in having God's Word which reveals those things that God wants His people to do. In addition, Jesus has sent His Holy Spirit to dwell in us and guide us in all truth and righteousness. Believers need to be sensitive to God's Spirit as they embark on life's journey, seeking opportunities to do what is right and to avoid what is wrong.

Third, believers please God when they "love kindness" and show genuine concern and mercy towards others. This attribute of God can be preeminent in the believers life as he yields to the Holy Spirit. Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, and self-control are all fruits (or by-products) of a Spirit-filled, Spirit-led life. Believers need to cry out for more of God and less of themselves. Only then will they have the grace to show kindness to others, especially those less fortunate than themselves. "He has told you O man what is good; and what does the LORD require of you, but to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God" (Mic. 6:8 NASB).

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