

**MICAH
FOR YOU**

STEPHEN UM
MICAH
FOR YOU



Micah For You

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SERIES PREFACE

Each volume of the *God's Word For You* series takes you to the heart of a book of the Bible, and applies its truths to your heart.

The central aim of each title is to be:

- Bible centered
- Christ glorifying
- Relevantly applied
- Easily readable

You can use *Micah For You*:

To read. You can simply read from cover to cover, as a book that explains and explores the themes, encouragements and challenges of this part of Scripture.

To feed. You can work through this book as part of your own personal regular devotions, or use it alongside a sermon or Bible-study series at your church. Each chapter is divided into two (or occasionally three) shorter sections, with questions for reflection at the end of each.

To lead. You can use this as a resource to help you teach God's word to others, both in small-group and whole-church settings. You'll find tricky verses or concepts explained using ordinary language, and helpful themes and illustrations along with suggested applications.

These books are not commentaries. They assume no understanding of the original Bible languages, nor a high level of biblical knowledge. Verse references are marked in **bold** so that you can refer to them easily. Any words that are used rarely or differently in everyday language outside the church are marked in **gray** when they first appear, and are explained in a glossary toward the back. There, you'll also find details of resources you can use alongside this one, in both personal and church life.

Our prayer is that as you read, you'll be struck not by the contents of this book, but by the book it's helping you open up; and that you'll praise not the author of this book, but the One he is pointing you to.

Carl Laferton, Series Editor

Bible translations used:

- ESV: English Standard Version (This is the version being quoted unless otherwise stated.)
- NIV: New International Version (2011 edition)
- NIV84: New International Version (1984 edition)

INTRODUCTION TO MICAH

We live in a broken world. But it is not a world beyond hope.

Exploitation tells us that something about this world is off. Oppression tells us that things are not the way they are supposed to be. And when we are honest, our hearts tell us that we are not the way we are supposed to be, or would like to be. We easily choose greed over generosity. We easily choose our comforts over others' needs. Wherever we look, we find something that makes us wonder why our world is the way it is.

These are the moments when we experience our innate longing for justice, mercy, fairness, and goodness. Whenever these desires are met in part, it's as if the world finally seems to be on the right track. It's almost as if the world is upside down, and justice allows us to catch a glimpse of the world right side up. This is why there are so many humanitarian efforts to fight against the constant reminders and the tragic manifestations of this broken and fallen world.

Our longing for justice is not just a 21st-century reality. It's a human reality. Ancient people have always been, and modern people still are, exploring the ideas of fairness, mercy, and goodness. What should these look like? How do we experience them? How do we pursue them? What prevents us from experiencing these realities in every moment we are awake?

Micah—this Old Testament prophet sent to speak God's word to God's people in the 8th century BC—deals with these tough questions. He speaks to us and our world as much as he spoke to his own. The most famous verse from Micah comes from chapter 6: "He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?" (6:6). You may have seen this verse on a poster or a bumper sticker. Micah 6:6 seems to succinctly summarize the heart of Micah, and it resonates with our desires to see goodness all around us. But when we take the time to read the entire book of Micah carefully, we

realize that God is not simply giving us a homework assignment about justice. The message for us is not simply a call to action to do good. God wants us to know the reason and the need for doing good—for his glory and for the flourishing of his creation—and to find the power to do it. Micah tells us that the sin of injustice is real, and that judgment is inevitable, but hope of restoration is coming. God has so much more to say to us through Micah than we might think.

As we walk through Micah, again and again we will see these major themes:

- *Sin*. Micah does not shy away from giving the word of God that lost people in the world of self-gain desperately need to hear. What the Israelites needed was a sobering exposure to the destructive nature of sin and God's absolute abhorrence of injustice. God is disgusted by oppression and abuse. He does not take sin lightly and he also does not treat sin superficially. He does not simply say that these things are bad and that bad people need to stop being bad. From the very beginning of the book, God is concerned about the Israelites' idolatrous worship. He points out that all the disastrous displays of sin that we experience in our lives have much more to do with our identity and worship than our behavior and action. The problem does not lie in behavior in and of itself, but rather in the heart behind it. Sin is rampant not only out there in the world but also in the deepest parts of our hearts. Micah will keep bringing us back to God's diagnosis of what is really happening underneath all the injustice we see with our naked eyes. That will be more challenging for us, but more transformative of us.
- *Judgment*. Because of sin, God tells us through Micah that judgment is inevitable. He does not and will not overlook sin and its consequences. It is against his nature to put a blind eye to sin and its consequences, and pretend they do not exist. This is why Micah is not the easiest book to read—not because it is boring or seems irrelevant, but because it makes us feel uncomfortable. We cry out for justice to be served for the wrongs of others... but we are not so sure that justice should be done to us, for our

wrongs. How even-handed are we when we demand justice? Micah makes us deal with these tough questions in life that we typically try to avoid. It is safe to say that if Micah does not make you feel uncomfortable, that is a clear sign that you are not reading it correctly. The inevitable consequences of judgment for oppression, evil, mistreatment of others, misuse of money, injustice, and abandonment are difficult to face. Micah is certainly not meant to be a feel-good read.

- *Hope.* However, even in a book like this, we see that God invites us to see the hope of restoration. It may take a while but he promises it. And because we are confronted by our sin and God's judgment, we are well-placed to appreciate the message of hope. This restoration is a **holistic*** one—one that brings true, lasting, and full transformation. Sin forces us to see the ugliness of our hearts, but the promise of rescue deals with the restoration of all things, including our hearts! When we are able to experience this holistic transformation that comes to us as a gift, ultimately through the work of Jesus Christ, we then find that God-given power to carry out justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with him. As the Israelites looked forward to this coming restorative hope that was ultimately displayed in King Jesus, we have the opportunity to look back to this already-come rescue in King Jesus to move us into gospel obedience. So in each chapter of this book, we will not only be hearing from Micah; we will be pointed to Christ, since he is the One in whom all the tragedies, tensions, hopes, and laments of Micah find their fulfillment

Christ is the One in whom all the tragedies, tensions, hopes, and laments of Micah find their resolution.

* Words in **gray** are defined in the Glossary (page 159).

and their resolution. In seeing how Christ dealt with his people and hung on a cross for his people and rose again for his people, we will see the promises of Micah gloriously coming to pass.

The categories of sin, judgment, and hope will be helpful for you as you go through this book. Keep each in mind as you read each part of Micah, even if the focus is on one in particular. But these are not just categories that serve us as helpful guidelines for reading Micah. These are the categories for us to rightly evaluate what is going on in our lives as well. Sin is rampant, and judgment is inevitable, but hope is coming! Indeed, this hope has already come to us in Christ, who took on the inevitable judgment of our sin.

As we read this prophet in light of the coming of Jesus, we find that Micah can inspire and transform us to do the justice we yearn for, and love the kindness we long to see, as we walk through life with the God of consistent justice and overwhelming kindness.

1. THE END OF IDOLATRY

Peter Shaffer's play *Equus* is an exploration of worship. It centers on a psychiatrist by the name of Martin Dysart, who is caring for a client by the name of Alan. Alan's issue is that he does not quite understand what reality is. He is very energetic, joyful, and full of life as he pursues the object of his affection. The problem is that the object of his worship—his "god"—is a horse (hence the name of the play, *Equus*).

For Alan to become sane, Dysart needs to strip away the object of his affections, the very thing that makes him happy—but the horse is what has actually made Alan an individual who is full of life and filled with passion. As he grapples with whether to pursue Alan's sense of reality over his sense of happiness, Dysart himself goes through an **existential** struggle. He asks himself:

"Who is really sane here? Is it this person who is engaged in worship, which is clearly a healthy thing, albeit for an animal? Or is it someone like me—someone who has no object of affection and who doesn't consider himself to believe in a god?"

(*Equus*, pages 93-95)

In a postscript commentary, Shaffer goes on to talk about it in this way, as the author and evangelist Rebecca Manley Pippert recounts:

"Unfashionable as it sounds, it is worship, he says, that sets us apart, that makes us unique. To be human is to worship. 'Real worship! Without worship you shrink. It's as brutal as that.'"

(*Hope Has Its Reasons*, pages 64-65)

So where does one go to find trustworthy objects for devotion? Therein lies our problem: there are all sorts of objects of devotion that fight for our affections. And therein lay the problem for God's people, the Israelites, in Micah's day. As we shall see, they were engaged in idolatry—the worship of idols.

Word in History

The book of Micah begins with an explanation of what we are about to read: “The word of the LORD that came to Micah of Moresheth in the days of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of **Judah**” (v 1*). In many of the other prophetic writings, the introductory phrase would be, for instance, “the word of Amos.” Here it is “the word of the LORD.” Micah's point here is to call the reader right from the beginning to give full attention to what is being said. This is “the word of the LORD.” In the original Hebrew, it literally means “the word of the LORD that happened.” In other words, it places an emphasis on a historical element. The word of God had happened in history and had come to Micah.

Micah is a professional prophet. There are some others who are not professional prophets, like Amos, who has another vocation. Micah's professional career, however, is to be a prophet. He is actually not from the region in which he speaks; he has come from outside to speak God's word (see Bruce Waltke's *Micah*, page 137).

The particular time the book speaks about can be discerned based on how it references three kings from Judah, the southern section of the promised land. (God's people had divided two centuries previously, during the reign of **Solomon**'s son Rehoboam—ever since, there had been two kingdoms: **Israel** to the north, centered on the capital of Samaria; Judah to the south, with Jerusalem as its capital.) Why is the time significant? Because it gives historical context. It is also significant that no kings of Israel are mentioned. In other words, they are

* All Micah verse references being looked at in each chapter part are in **bold**.

not even worthy to be mentioned in what is happening here because of the idolatrous activity they have led their nation into.

Nevertheless, Micah says that this is the word “which he saw concerning Samaria and Jerusalem.” This word is coming to God’s people for both Israel and Judah, for both Samaria and Jerusalem.

There are three key points in this section. First, Micah describes the judgment for idolatry. Secondly, he describes attachment to idolatry. Lastly, he describes rescue from idolatry. So if we are to grasp Micah’s message to them and to us, we need first to think carefully about their idolatry, and ours.

Here is what makes the book challenging: Micah doesn’t give readers any glimpse of restoration early on—it will only come later, and by way of rebuke. The deliverance will come through judgment. Restoration will come through rebuke. The resurrection will come through suffering. This is why a message like this is hard for any audience to receive.

Treading the High Places

First, the judgment for idolatry. This can be seen throughout the first chapter. Micah says that the LORD is coming out from his “holy temple” (presumably here meaning his heavenly dwelling-place, not the Jerusalem temple, though it could be either) as a witness against the inhabitants of the earth (primarily his people), and that he is going to provide cosmic judgment (**v 2**). What is the reason for or cause of this judgment? “The LORD is coming out of his place, and will come down and tread upon the high places of the earth” (**v 3**). “High places” were the **pagan** sanctuaries for idolatrous worship. And God warns that “All [his people’s] carved images shall be beaten to pieces, all her wages shall be burned with fire, and all her idols I will lay waste, for from the fee of a prostitute she gathered them, and to the fee of a prostitute they shall return” (**v 7**).

The very existence of “high places” is the key to understanding what has gone wrong in Israel and Judah. God’s people were told to

worship God in Jerusalem, where the temple of God and his presence were—but they have instead chosen to worship somewhere else. Not only that, but they have also chosen to worship someone else. They worship someone else by going after carved images. If people choose to worship God in a way that is different from the one he sets out, very soon they will choose to worship a god who is different from the One who is real.

People engage in injustice because of their idolatry.

Idolatry is choosing one's own will above God's will. It is giving ultimate allegiance—which deserves to be given to God alone—to another object of worship, another object of affection. That object could be wealth, influence, romance, power, control, approval, or comfort, and so on. Notice that **verse 7** promises that "her wages shall be burned with fire," because part of this idolatry—which is the reason why God's people are going to receive judgment from God—is idolatry centered around wealth. Not only that, but Micah also uses the **metaphor** of prostitution. This is the link between the people's idolatry and the people's injustice: they engage in injustice because of their idolatry of wealth and of sex. And God's judgment is going to come and destroy these idols.

Is God's Judgment Harsh?

Don't miss the scale of the judgment: it involves mountains melting and valleys splitting (**v 4**). This seems a little harsh. As long as people engage in good things, why should God come down so strongly and judge his own people? (By the way, Christians tend to think about judgment as related to the judgment of the world. It is important to know that God's judgment in the Bible is usually directed at those who are professing to be his people, because it is very possible to be born into a godly family, or to do all the "right rituals," and yet be so lost in idol-worship that in fact you have no relationship with God at all.

Here, the word of judgment is being spoken to and against the people of God in Samaria and Jerusalem.) Modern people have been brought up to find the notion of God's judgment very difficult. We like to hear about the mercy, forgiveness, grace, and love of God—but not his judgment, his wrath, or his anger. But the Bible clearly teaches that the God of mercy, forgiveness, **grace**, and love is at the same time the God who demonstrates anger and shows judgment against idolatry and idolaters.

So we must ask ourselves (because, even if we do not struggle with this, others who do will ask us), “How can I reconcile the anger of God with the love of God? How can I reconcile judgment with **justification**? How can I reconcile God's fury against his own people along with his grace? How is this possible?”

Becky Manley Pippert's insights are very helpful here. She points out that all loving persons are sometimes filled with anger—not just despite their love, but because of their love. The problem, Pippert notes, is that modern readers tend to be influenced by their own responses when analyzing God's, including his wrath. It is their own anger, their own irritability, their own wrath, their own fury, pettiness, and jealousies that they imagine, and this becomes a problem when analyzing God's anger and judgment. So if they are petty and emotionally lash out and explode on somebody with unrighteous anger, they think that that is how a wrathful God responds too.

The Bible, however, doesn't teach that God responds with unrighteous anger, but rather, with righteous anger. Pippert goes on to say:

“Think of how we feel when we see someone we love ravaged by unwise actions or relationships. Do we respond with benign tolerance as we might toward strangers? Far from it. We are dead against whatever is destroying the one we love.”

(Hope Has Its Reasons, page 100)

She gives the example of a drug addict. Suppose you have a loved one—a sibling, parent, child, friend—who is addicted to drugs, and you can see how this addiction is ruining her life. She's going down

this path of destruction and it will ruin her career and her future. Are you just going to come alongside of her with benign tolerance and say, "It's probably not a good idea for you to do this. Your life is really complex because of this. I'm just suggesting that it might not be a bad idea that you abandon all of that." And if they respond by saying, "Oh no, it's not a problem at all. It's recreational; I'm not addicted to this. My life is perfectly fine; there's no need to worry," thus revealing that they are in complete denial, would you respond with "tolerance" and say, "Oh, sorry, I didn't want to offend you. I just wanted to suggest that a different path may be something you could possibly consider, but you must do what seems best to you." No! As Pippert points out, love would cause you to respond:

"'Do you know what you're doing to yourself? You become less and less yourself every time I see you.' I wasn't angry because I hated that person, I was angry because I cared. I was angry because I love them. I could have walked away, but love detests what destroys the beloved. Love destroys that which destroys the beloved. As a parent of grown-up children, I understand this more and more. When they're young kids, they don't have the competency to really, really mess up their lives. But once they're teenagers, they do have the ability to mess things up and to mess themselves up. They can worship idols that lead them down dark paths, even as the world cheers them on. Real love stands against the deception, the lie, the sin that destroys."

(Hope Has its Reasons, page 100)

And love also stands against the person who hurts the child we love, who treats them unjustly. Why? Because anger is not the opposite of love. Anger flows out of love. Hatred or indifference is the opposite of love; anger is not. God may also be displaying this kind of love as he sees the wounds of Judah, his people (**v 9**). God will judge his people now, to remove their idols and return them to himself, so that they will not be left with their idols and be destroyed by them, and along with them, at his final judgment.

Looked at this way, when God judges his own people because of their idolatry and their injustice, it makes all the sense in the world, just as it makes all the sense in the world for us to not want to see our children engaged in activity that will destroy them, and to oppose those who are hurting them.

The Danger of Co-Existence

The pastor and theologian Tim Keller writes:

“The greatest danger, because it is such a subtle temptation which enables us to continue as church members and feel that nothing is wrong, is not that we become atheists, but that we ask God to co-exist with idols in our hearts.”

(Judges for You, page 38)

This is the type of idolatry that God’s people are engaged in. They have not actively, definitively rejected the God of the Scriptures. They have deliberately, consciously added other objects of worship to their worship of him. This is idolatry. It is, as God says through Micah, prostitution (**v 7**). It is spiritual adultery.

Among those who commit adultery, there are some who are no longer interested in their marriage. Once they’ve been exposed, they say, “This is the time for me to move on. I don’t love you anymore. I don’t want to be in this relationship.” But many people who are engaged in adultery will say, “I still love you” to the spouse they have cheated on. They’ll be sorry, and they’ll protest their commitment—and then they’ll cheat again.

Spiritually, that is the sort of idolatry that is adulterous. These people are saying, “God, we want to enjoy all the benefits of knowing you and being loved by you, and we do love you too—but we also want to be free to worship other things, too, because they make us happy.” When we see their idolatry (and ours) in this way, we begin to see why God abhors it. We begin to grasp why God is angry over it. We begin to see why God speaks into this idolatry with

judgment—because humans have such a strong attachment to their idols. There can be no rescue if there is not first removal of the objects of our idolatry. And, for the people in Micah’s day, that would come through judgment.

Questions for reflection

1. “Idolatry is ... giving ultimate allegiance—which deserves to be given to God alone—to another object of worship, another object of affection.” None of us are immune from idol-worship. What are the three idols you are most prone to worship?
2. How would you explain the way God’s anger and God’s love work together to someone who is struggling with the idea that a loving God gets angry?
3. Why is asking the Lord to accept co-existence with other “gods” so easy to do?

PART TWO

An Idol Attachment

Micah has spoken about God's judgment against idolatry. Now he turns to consider their attachment to their idolatry.

An idol captures the hearts and imaginations of those who worship it. This is what it says in Psalm 1: "Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers. But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night" (v 1-2, NIV84). It is true that if a mind is shaped by meditation and reflection on God's word, then the life will be shaped as well, resulting in happiness. Yet people falsely assume that even if they are not shaped by meditation and reflection on God's word, there isn't anything else out there that is going to shape them. They think that they aren't being influenced and shaped—that they aren't delighting in or meditating on some other source. That is a complete lie.

Everyone is being influenced and shaped by other sources. Those who live in opposition to God are being influenced by standing in the way of sinners and sitting in the seat of mockers. Their hearts and imaginations are being captured and captivated by other objects of affection. Keller puts it this way in his unpublished resource, *Gospel Communication*:

"Fascism makes an idol of one's race and nationality. Socialism makes an idol of the state. Capitalism makes an idol of the free market. Humanism makes an idol of reason and science. Individualism makes an idol out of individual freedom. Traditionalism makes the family and tradition an idol."

(page 90)

What happens is that when all these corporate stories and idols are elevated, they begin to shape the lives of those who worship them. Consider then, what are those things for you?

Look at what it says in Micah’s (or rather, God’s) indictment. Micah **1:10-15** lists out names of towns that are hard to pronounce. Why are they included? First of all, because Micah is tracing out the path of the Assyrian army, which would ultimately end up overtaking Israel. These are all the places that its king, Sennacherib, would come to in order to take control over these regions. This is the path of the means of God’s judgment.

Second, Micah is also trying to show that even though these cities have hopes based on their particular location, those hopes will not come to fruition. “Beth-le-aphrah,” means the “house of dust” (**v 10**). Micah says to them, *Guess what? You’re going to ultimately roll yourselves in dust.* He refers to “Shaphir”

(**v 11**). The meaning of that word is “beauty town,” and yet Micah tells them that they are going to live in nakedness and shame. “Zaanan” means “going forth town,” but Micah says, “Do not come out.” “Beth-ezel” means a “house of taking away,” yet they “shall take away from you its standing place” (see Waltke, *Micah*,

Micah uses puns to describe the ironic nature of the eventual destruction.

page 154). Micah uses deliberate puns to describe the ironic nature of the eventual destruction: the very thing that each place worships will be the source of its destruction and the place where its judgment is most clearly seen.

These puns are mentioned throughout this list, and then **verse 15** says, “I will again bring a conqueror to you, inhabitants of Mareshah; the glory of Israel shall come to Adullam.” The conqueror is referring to King Sennacherib, and the word “Mareshah” means “dispossess.” Adullam was the cave where David went in order to flee the attack from **Saul** (1 Samuel 22:1). What Micah is saying is that his audience is going to want to flee because judgment is coming against their idolatry. There will be no place where there is reprieve or rest. This is the indictment and the judgment that is coming upon them: “Make

yourselves bald and cut off your hair, for the children of your delight; make yourselves as bald as the eagle, for they shall go from you into exile” (Micah **1:16**). When he says, “Make yourselves bald and cut off your hair,” it is a reference to shame.

Writing Our Storylines

The names of those towns in Micah’s day may be distant from (and unpronounceable to) us, but they should provoke us to consider the way we too become attached to idols today. Personal idolatry really feeds on our desire to develop our identity and our security. Whatever the false promises are that are given by these counterfeit hopes, we gravitate toward them because we believe they will give us an answer for the deep longings within our hearts.

But there is also corporate, societal idolatry—the cultural narrative of a city or culture. The ultimate storyline of a city like Boston, my home, revolves around the idol of knowledge. Boston has an inferiority complex toward New York because New York has the best, the biggest, and the greatest of everything. What does Boston say? We don’t care whether we have the best of everything; we just want to be the smartest person in the room. “Yeah, that’s what you think in New York, but you know where you got that idea? You got it in Boston. The smartest people in New York are the ones who were educated and trained in Boston. That’s just a fact.” This is the way people think.

But this Bostonian assumption ends up affecting how we view people who engage in certain types of vocation that aren’t considered “elite” or “superior” or full of contemplation. That work comes to have less value. The educated can begin to believe that they’re doing work that’s more important or that they themselves are more evolved. These corporate idols of knowledge, credentials, and career tend to support and undergird the injustices in our society. The things held in high esteem oftentimes lead to injustice. Greed undergirds the disparities

of wealth and poverty. Power undergirds racism and classism. Our corporate idols are behind all our injustices.

When people abandon the worship of the one true God to worship an idol, they begin to devise a storyline of their own. Yet they eventually start to suspect that perhaps they aren't as worthy as they thought. Their narrative tells them, "This is how you're supposed to be," but they fall short of the narrative, so they start feeling insecure. Then they start getting to the point where there is a sense of worthlessness. That leads to shame, which ultimately leads to anxiety. How then do people try to deal with that? One way is to try to escape from their circumstances. Another is to try to control their circumstances. But both ways still result in lives dominated by that idol, either in running from it or seeking to master it. Even if you see how you are worshiping an idol, it is harder than we naturally imagine not to stay attached to it.

The Advocate Arrives

Micah is 70% judgment and 30% restoration and deliverance. Here at the beginning, even careful readers of Micah 1 won't see a whole lot of allusions to restoration, salvation, or deliverance. This is why it's hard. In chapter 2 Micah warns readers, *I'm not going to be like that prophet that says things that will make people happy. I am a prophet of God's word; I have to speak God's word, as difficult as it is.* But the hope of rescue can be found.

This is a court case. God is the tribunal judge and he is calling the Israelites, who are the defendants. The Old Testament commentator Bruce Waltke talks about this section as a "call to a legal trial." He finds several elements in this call to trial:

1. A summons to the legal trial: "Hear, you peoples, all of you; pay attention, O earth, and all that is in it, and let the Lord GOD be a witness against you..." (v 2). Notice the legal language: Micah is saying, *Everyone, listen, here's the summons. Here's the subpoena. You're being summoned. I want you to come to the legal trial.*

2. A punitive epiphany: This means a kind of unfolding judgment that is still yet to come. Micah is giving a preview—an epiphany—of what that judgment will look like, in the case of a guilty verdict. The mountains will melt as God comes in judgment, and the valleys will “split open like wax before the fire” (v 4).
3. An accusation leveled against both Samaria and Jerusalem: “All this is for the **transgression** of Jacob and for the sins of the house of Israel. What is the transgression of Jacob? Is it not Samaria? And what is the high place of Judah? Is it not Jerusalem?” (v 5). This is the idolatry, the sin, the transgression.
4. The sentence: This is given in **verse 6**: “Therefore I will make Samaria a heap in the open country, a place for planting vineyards, and I will pour down her stones into the valley and uncover her foundations.”

So the people are summoned, there’s a picture of punishment, there is an accusation of the crime of idolatry, and then there is a sentence for that idolatry.

But where is the rescue? Well, as this legal trial proceeds, there is somebody who is trying to intercede as an advocate on behalf of the people. His name is Micah.

The meaning of the name “Micah” in the Hebrew is “Who is like **Yahweh**?” or “Who is like God?” And Micah comes to intercede. So as he thinks about the people and their sentence, he says, “For this I will lament and wail; I will go stripped and naked; I will make lamentation like the jackals, and mourning like the ostriches. For her wound is incurable, and it has come to Judah; it has reached to the gate of my people, to Jerusalem” (v 8-9).

God’s judgment is very, very close to the fortification, to the gates, to the walls of this city where his people are protected. But Micah is trying to come on behalf of them as they’ve been called to a legal trial. Micah is trying to advocate for them, even to the point where he’s willing to be stripped naked, to lament on their behalf. Micah

understands that that is where the idolatry will lead—to the shame triad (for more on this see Ed Welch, *When People are Big and God is Small*, pages 170-171):

1. Feeling exposed
2. Rejection: feeling that you're not accepted
3. Contamination: feeling unclean

But Micah can't change anything. He can only lament; he can only join with them in being naked, rejected, and ashamed.

So where is the rescue?! Well, the story of Micah is, of course, part of the much larger story of the whole Bible, and as we read it in that context, we realize that there is somebody who has come into the courtroom—someone who, unlike Micah, can intercede, and somebody who actually can be an advocate. “Who is like Yahweh?” No one. No one is like Yahweh. Except then Jesus enters the courtroom, and he answers the question “Who is like Yahweh?” by saying, *No one is like Yahweh. And I am him. I am not like God. I **am** God.*

Not only that, but Jesus essentially came to earth to say, *I'm the Lord who will become naked so that you will be clothed with my righteousness. I am the Lord who will be rejected so that you will be fully accepted and embraced. I am the Lord who will become unclean and contaminated by your idolatry so that you might be rescued from its judgment and its attraction. I am the advocate.*

This advocate, this rescuer, is the only One who will be able to help us to dismantle our idols. He is the only One who can absorb the judgment of God so that we can be freed by the power of the gospel. The perfect legal advocate is the Lord himself. He is the only One who can be the answer to the question “Who is like God?” He is the only One who can free us from putting idols on the throne of our hearts, either in his place or co-occupying it with him. He is the only One who will fully satisfy everything that we're longing for.

Many people have a sense of worthlessness, shame, fear, anxiety, and depression. The world, the flesh, and the evil one tell them

over and over again, *You're no good. You're ugly. You're worthless. You're despicable. You're a nobody. You're an utter failure. You'll never please your parents. You'll never gain their approval. You'll never get anywhere. You're nobody.* That's the voice that they hear over and over. And outside of a saving relationship to God, in one sense much of that is true. But in response, Jesus comes into the room and says these powerful words of truth: *I won't just enter into sharing with you your shame and nakedness; I'll take them from you. God the Father says, You are my beloved. Nothing can change that. You are my beloved. You are my chosen possession. In you I am well pleased, because I was well pleased with my beloved Son, who absorbed the judgment that you deserved so that you might receive the acceptance and embrace that he deserved.*

This is the picture of the gospel. This is the power that will root out and dismantle all the appetites for the other objects of affection, both now and forever. Micah could do no more than join the lament. Jesus came in order to remove our lament.

Micah could do no more than lament. Jesus came to remove our lament.

Questions for reflection

1. What is the cultural storyline that dominates your own city or society?
2. Have you experienced an area in which you have been idolatrous, and then found that that area is the place where life falls apart?
3. How does comparing Micah and Jesus move you to appreciate Jesus more deeply and worship him more joyfully?