

God's Judgment and Hope in Micah

SCOTT HOEZEE

The biblical book of Micah is known to most people mainly because of the verse that says: He has shown you, O, mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God. Now, that is a famous verse; what we tend to forget, however, is that what Micah mostly wanted to say through that verse, as well as throughout most of the book, is that those were precisely the things that the people of Israel were *not* doing. So, judgment will come. Today on *Groundwork*, let's explore the prophecy of Micah. Stay tuned.

DARRELL DELANEY

Welcome to *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Darrell Delaney.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee; and Darrell, here is episode three of a six-part series we are doing on *Groundwork* on the Old Testament minor prophets. We have mentioned before that they are minor only in the sense that they are much shorter than the more major prophetic books like Isaiah. So far in this series, we have looked at Obadiah and Joel and Amos; and still to come after today's look at Micah will be Nahum, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. That is nine of the twelve minor prophets, but we have covered...or will cover...the other three in other *Groundwork* series. And in this first segment for this program, we are going to take an overview of Micah, and we will see how Micah kind of sets the stage for this book. Then in the next segment, we will focus on his many passages of judgment, and on some of the specific crimes and sins with which he charges Israel. Then, in the last part of this program, we will look at the hope for restoration that Micah also scatters, actually, all through the book. You mentioned, I think, in the previous program on Amos, Darrell, that that is sort of the rhythm of all of the prophetic books. Lots of doom and gloom, but that is not the end; lots of hope; lots of light shining for future hope and future restoration.

DARRELL DELANEY

Judgment/hope, judgment/hope is what happens in these books to show God's character. It is interesting that God is not shying away from the sin and the problems that people have incurred in their lives, and what they have done or what they failed to do, but that does not stop God's plan from redeeming and restoring and bringing restoration to them. So, I love the fact that the rhythm shows that even if you think about your own life, that you could have some situations that you have caused that bring God's punishment upon you, but you also have the opportunity to turn around, get it right and repent so God can use you, and you actually be part of his plans.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And we will note first as we get into this: Micah's very name in Hebrew—Mee-ki-yah—it means: Who is like Yahweh; who is like God? And indeed, the character of God, the nature of God, God's holiness and righteousness and justice...those are all important to see, particularly since, as we said at the beginning of this episode, in Micah's day, the Israelites themselves were not very holy or righteous or just at all; and so, this book is going to answer the question posed by Micah's very name: Who is like God?

DARRELL DELANEY

And Micah is apparently a contemporary of Isaiah, and his words sound a lot like Isaiah's. Actually, in the first thirty-nine chapters, when Isaiah is throwing the blistering judgment on the people, Micah is in that same context. Even though a lot of his attention is focused on the southern kingdom, he also has some harsh words for the northern kingdom as well.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; we said that the beginning of this series that some of the minor prophets focus only on the northern kingdom of Israel that was wiped out by the Assyrians in 721 [BC]. Other minor prophets focus only on the southern kingdom of Judah that was wiped out by the Babylonians in 587 [BC]. Micah has a little bit for both; we will see that in just a moment; but on both Israel and Judah, Micah comes down hard on the people because of covenant unfaithfulness; and Micah predicts what I just said. He predicts that the northern kingdom will be wiped out by Assyria; he predicts the southern kingdom will get thrashed by the Babylonians; and again, we will get into the specifics of Micah's accusation in a bit; but clearly, this is a book of thunderous judgments and dire predictions of grave calamities to come.

DARRELL DELANEY

Let's look at one of those in opening chapter of Micah. It says: The word of the Lord that came to Micah of Moresheth during the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah—the vision he saw concerning Samaria and Jerusalem. ²Here, you peoples, all of you, listen, earth and all who live in it, that the Sovereign Lord may bear witness against you, the Lord from his holy temple. ³Look! The Lord is coming from his dwelling place; he comes down and treads on the heights of the earth. ⁴The mountains melt beneath him and the valleys split apart, like wax before the fire, like water rushing down a slope. ⁵All this is because of Jacob's transgression, because of the sins of the people of Israel. What is Jacob's transgression? Is it not Samaria? What is Judah's high place? Is it not Jerusalem? ⁶Therefore I will make Samaria a heap of rubble, a place for planting vineyards. I will pour her stones into the valley and lay bare her foundations. ^{7a}All her idols will be broken to pieces; all her temple gifts will be burned with fire; I will destroy all her images.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, there you have it. So, Samaria was the capital of the northern kingdom, and Jerusalem was the capital of the southern kingdom; and so, in these words in the opening verses of Micah, we see that both Samaria and Jerusalem are coming under the fires of God's judgment.

So, Micah's words were pretty searing, but like many of the prophets, he also was often called to act out things. I mean, if you read the book of Ezekiel, you know, Ezekiel was asked to do a lot of kind of crazy things, like build a model of the temple and then lay next to it for the better part of a year, or cut his hair on a sidewalk or something. I mean, Jeremiah at one point was told to go bury his underwear in the ground. I mean, the prophets had to some kind of nutty things. It appears in Micah's case that he had to strip naked to call even more attention to the sorry condition of Israel.

He writes:

⁸Because of this I will weep and wail; I will go about barefoot and naked. I will howl like a jackal and moan like an owl. ⁹For Samaria's plague is incurable; it has spread to Judah. It has reached the very gate of my people, even to Jerusalem itself.

DARRELL DELANEY

It seems that God did use very powerful imagery to arrest the attention of the people, and hopefully, they paid attention. It doesn't seem like that they were paying attention, but the point was that God did everything he could to get their attention to arrest it to tell them to stop it; to get them to turn back to him. So, Amos and Micah and all the prophets were given these ways to address these things in a very graphic and visual way.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Well, and you know, it has been noted before that what happens to the prophets of the Old Testament...it is almost like they become inhabited by God, you know; it is like they become possessed by God. It almost

unhinges them. I mean, it is almost unbearable to actually see the world through God's eyes, and you are like possessed—you are inhabited by God himself. It makes them shrill because they need to be shrill; it makes them do very, very curious things like walking around naked and howling like a jackal; but they had to get the peoples' attention.

Well, in just a moment, though, let's look at some of the specific items for which God, through Micah, laid into the Israelites. So, you will want to stay tuned for that.

Segment 2

DARRELL DELANEY

I am Darrell Delaney, with Scott Hoezee, and you are listening to *Groundwork*.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Darrell, let's now jump to Micah 3 to hear some of the specifics of the case against Israel; and what we are about to read, Darrell, counts as one of the most graphic passages in the whole Bible. Then I said, "Listen, you leaders of Jacob, you rulers of Israel. Should you not embrace justice, ²you who hate good and love evil; who tear the skin from my people and the flesh from their bones; ³who eat my people's flesh, strip off their skin and break their bones in pieces; who chop them up like meat for the pan, like flesh for the pot?" ⁴[Then] they will cry out to the Lord, but he will not answer them. At that time, he will hide his face from them because of the evil they have done. ⁵This is what the Lord says: "As for the prophets who lead my people astray, they proclaim 'peace' if they have something to eat, but prepare to wage war against anyone who refuses to feed them.

DARRELL DELANEY

I see two big problems in this passage, Scott. The first part of that passage, where it literally refers to cannibalism, I can see people's faces turning pale as they hear this word, and they are getting nauseous and they are starting to feel a little sick, because this is really graphic. That is the first thing; and the second thing is that these prophets are saying: Peace, peace; when there is no peace. So, I mean, the graphic situation at first is what we could address immediately, but then after that, let's address that part about the prophets.

SCOTT HOEZEE

It reminds me of a famous essay by the writer Jonathan Swift, titled: *A Modest Proposal*. In that essay, Swift uses searing satire and irony to assail the British for their treatment of the Irish people in his day; and so, in that essay, he suggests that since the British were devouring the Irish anyway, he wanted to help them by providing recipes and serving suggestions for the eating of Irish babies, you know...

DARRELL DELANEY

Oh...

SCOTT HOEZEE

A nice, plump baby could easily feed a family of four, he says, with searing irony. Yes, of course, the imagery of eating a human child is grotesque, and so is what Micah says of the political leaders, and even the temple priests of Israel. They are spiritual cannibals—they are eating the people alive—they are doing one-hundred-percent the opposite of what God's law demanded.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; and it echoes Ezekiel 34, shepherds and sheep, where the shepherds are not taking care of the sheep. They are eating the sheep; they are taking them and they are exploiting the people; and that is an image for how they are doing the people of God. It is not real sheep; it is a parable that is kind of an image of that. This situation is even far more graphic than that, and it is designed to be graphic because it is supposed to stop them in their tracks to say: We are doing that? I cannot believe we are doing that! They are supposed to be appalled by it; they are supposed to be appalled by their own actions, but they are not.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; and again, God told them to go out of their way to protect the poor, the widow, the orphan, the immigrant. They had to go out of their way to take care of them, and instead, they are basically eating them alive; and as the writer Flannery O'Connor often noted: Sometimes the best way to get people's attention is to get grotesque; you know, get up in their faces with an imagery that really will be arresting, and hopefully, convicting.

But, yes; you mentioned, Darrell, the so-called prophets in Israel, too. They also were a problem.

DARRELL DELANEY

It is funny that you use the word "prophets" with quotes, because they are winking and they are taking these bribes and they are looking the other way and saying: Oh, yes; I will say 'peace' if you help me out in the back here, or do this deal with me. When I see the word *prophet*, I turn it into *p-r-o-f-i-t* instead of *p-r-o-p-h-e-t* because they actually get money, or they are getting bribed, to be able to say that there is peace, when God is not in that word. That is a lie; it is not peaceful right now; and they cannot seem to do that because they are corrupted.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; bring out a nice casserole for supper to the prophet and he will say: I predict that you are going to have great peace and prosperity in your life; show up in front of a prophet emptyhanded and he will wage war, is what Micah actually says. They are just going to say: Well, nothing is going to go for you, man. So, in other words, they had no interest in actually hearing a word from God that they could then speak to the people, which is what a prophet is supposed to do, right? They were prophetic guns for hire. They would predict nice things to the people who bribe them, and terrible things to the people who refuse to bribe them. Basically that, Darrell, is the definition of a false prophet.

DARRELL DELANEY

And so, Micah goes after the political leaders; he goes after the religious leaders; he goes after the prophets of Israel. He is not sparing anybody in this situation, because every level of institution has been corrupted from top to bottom, and he needs to address that situation. Because when they are exploiting the poor, and when they are actually looking to do better themselves in not caring about, not going out of their way, like you said that we should be doing, then God has taken up that case. That is a problem.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; and you know, I mean, there are three anointed offices in ancient Israel: Prophet, priest and king. And all three of them are on the take. I mean, that is how bad things are. The people who anointed, they are in very bad shape. So, indeed; but, Darrell, we could also pick up some more notes of prophetic judgment from Micah 6.

DARRELL DELANEY

Listen to what the Lord says: "Stand up, plead my case before the mountains; let the hills hear what you have to say. ²Hear, you mountains, the Lord's accusation; listen, you everlasting foundations of the earth. For the Lord has a case against his people; he is lodging a charge against Israel. ³"My people, what have I done to you? How have I burdened you? Answer me. ⁴I brought you up out of Egypt and redeemed you from the land of slavery. I sent Moses to lead you, also Aaron and Miriam. ⁵My people, remember what Balak king of Moab plotted and what Balaam son of Beor answered. Remember your journey from Shittim to Gilgal, that you may know the righteous acts of the Lord."

SCOTT HOEZEE

Now that is a very important passage because, Darrell, in the prophetic literature of the Old Testament, there are several specific forms of speech—forms of address; and this one is a very common one. In Hebrew it is called a *riv*—a *riv*—which is, indeed, essentially a legal case. So, just as today, lawyers might bring a case against an accused bank robber in a court of law, so the prophets often depicted God as bringing a legal

case...and it is often as though the mountains are the jury. You know, God accuses; God is the plaintiff and the prosecution all in one; and Israel is the defendant; and basically, you know, God is saying: You better get a good lawyer because I've got a really strong *riv*...I've got a really strong case against you.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; it is interesting that God will often, before judgment, bring up the track record of what he has done faithfully: I brought you out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm; I fed you manna in the desert; I gave you quail; I gave you the Promised...and this is how you are going to treat me after all of that? I don't deserve this. So, God usually brings back his track record of what he has done to serve you and help you and bless you, and then he shows where your folly is and where you have neglected him and you haven't even acknowledged that; and so, I think that that lawyer case is a very good analogy. You do not want God to be the lawyer against you. You want God to be your advocate.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; and God would love to do that, but he cannot ignore...as we see all through the minor prophets...he just cannot ignore...he cannot turn a blind eye to sin because he is holy. He cannot just, you know, act like this is no big deal. He has to bring the case; he has to bring Israel to court.

So, anything hopeful about the book of Micah? Well, yes there is; and we are going to turn to that in just a moment, and also consider what Micah means for us yet today. So, stay tuned.

Segment 3

DARRELL DELANEY

You are listening to *Groundwork*, where we are digging into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Darrell Delaney.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee; and Darrell, most of the hope for restoration in the book of Micah comes near the very end; but you know, if you read through Micah, you will notice that even following some of the harshest sections of judgment, Micah tucks in a word of hope. So, after the searing judgments in Micah 1 and 2, here is how Micah 2 ends: ¹²“I will surely gather all of you, Jacob; I will surely bring together the remnant of Israel. I will bring them together like sheep in a pen, like a flock in its pasture; the place will throng with people. ¹³The One who breaks open the way will go up before them; they will break through the gate and go out. Their King will pass through before them, the Lord at their head.”

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; it says the One with a capital O, and it says the King with a capital K. So, we know that it is not anybody in their context. It is a prophetic word that looks toward the Messiah; and also, he does another one as far as hope goes in Chapter 4, and it says: ¹In the last days the mountain of the Lord's temple will be established as the highest of the mountains; it will be exalted above the hills, and peoples will stream to it. ²Many nations will come and say, “Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the temple of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths.” The law will go out from Zion, the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. ³He will judge between many peoples and will settle disputes for strong nations far and wide. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Famous image there, Darrell, at the end; that, you know, in the ultimate kingdom of God, we are going to turn weapons into agricultural instruments. As Neal Plantinga once said, it is sort of like saying, you know, that someday we are going to turn Howitzer tanks into John Deere garden tractors so that we can plant things and grow things in the new creation. So, that was Micah 4; and striking, Darrell, that that comes right after that grotesque cannibalism imagery that we saw in Micah 3.

Let's pick up another one real quick from Micah 5, because this is like an arrow pointing straight at the birth of Jesus—the final Messiah—the final Son of David:

²“But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from the ancient times.” ⁴He will stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the Lord in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God. And they will live securely, for then his greatness will reach to the ends of the earth.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, we have judgment that justice needs to be served; we have a holy God who is not going to wink his eye at sin; he is not going to just act like it is not happening; and we have hope; we have restoration; we have the promise that it is coming. So, I love that there is a rhythm there, and even in our own personal lives, if we go off the rails and we disobey God, there is a God who will address that sin and not act like it didn't happen, but also gives an opportunity for restoration. That is our life.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; judgment must come, but restoration will come. Final justice for all will come. The Messiah—the Savior—the ultimate Son of King David will come. This is probably the point in Micah, Darrell, where, as Christians, we find it easiest to see ourselves in the picture, because Jesus, who was born in Bethlehem...and Micah talks about that ruler coming out of Bethlehem...in fact, you know, the rulers of Judah...of Israel quoted this verse when King Herod met that Magi, and said: We heard of a new king...and so, Herod is all upset, and he says: Where is he going to be born? And they said: Well, it says it right here in Micah 5, it is going to be Bethlehem. So, we now know that we are the living beneficiaries of the restoration and hope that Micah talks about; although, Darrell, probably we would be letting ourselves off Micah's various hooks too easily if we left the application of this prophetic book at just that. We also need to be sobered also yet today by the searing sections of judgment here; in fact, we can hear something, including that best-known verse in Micah 6.

DARRELL DELANEY

It says: ⁶With what shall I come before the Lord and bow down before the exalted God? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? ⁷Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousand rivers of olive oil? Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? ⁸He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.

So, when you put that verse in context, it sounds a little different than what we normally hear in church services.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; this is actually part of that *riv*...part of that court case against Israel that we talk about in the previous segment of this episode. So indeed, this is a reminder of the things that Israel was not doing. They were not loving justice and mercy or walking humbly with God; and if they didn't repent of that, boy, trouble was going to come, and it won't matter how much worship they do; it won't matter how many sacrifices...they can make whole rivers of olive oil sacrificed to God, and it won't make any difference if they don't shape up.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; and it echoes back to 1 Samuel, because it is not about the sacrifices you offer to the Lord, it is about obeying God's voice.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DARRELL DELANEY

What did God tell us to do? Don't do that! That is how you are actually called to live, and no amount of worship or no amount of sacrifice will erase the disobedience that needs to be addressed there; but I love the fact that God is calling us beyond just rituals and worship services on Sunday, even though worship services

are great, that is not going to make that stuff disappear...

SCOTT HOEZEE

No.

DARRELL DELANEY

We need to come to God and offer our hearts to him, and live the life he has called us to live.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And we saw this in the previous program of this series, from Amos. As Nicholas Wolterstorff often points out, in the Bible it is clear. When worship takes place in the context of injustice, it is not just off-putting to God, it makes God sick to his stomach. He finds it nauseating. So, our commitment, that we can carry out ever and only by the power of the Holy Spirit, of course...our commitment has to be showing love to all, seeking justice for all, repenting of the times we end up participating in injustice, and then letting the Holy Spirit set us back on the right path; on which, we keep trying to walk humbly with our God.

DARRELL DELANEY

And what better way to conclude this program than to look at the closing words that Micah wrote in Chapter 7. I mean, his name means: Who is like God? And Micah plays on his own name in the last words that say this: ¹⁸Who is a God like you, who pardons sin and forgives the transgression of the remnant of his inheritance? You do not stay angry forever but delight to show mercy. ¹⁹You will again have compassion on us; you will tread our sins underfoot and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Indeed, as we just said, Micah's name means: Who is like Yahweh? Who is Yahweh? Well, we just found out in the course of these seven chapters: He is a God of justice, who has to judge sin absolutely, but he is also a God who is eager to forgive; eager to have compassion on us; eager to hurl all of our iniquities into the depth of the sea. So, we can thank Micah for that encouragement and say thanks be to God.

DARRELL DELANEY

Thank you for listening and digging deeply into scripture with *Groundwork*. We hope you will join us again next time as we study the prophetic books of Nahum and Zephaniah. Connect with us now at groundworkonline.com to share with us what *Groundwork* means to you, or to tell us what you would like the hear discussed next on *Groundwork*.

SCOTT HOEZEE

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