

Bible Studies - Term 2 2021



Welcome to Bible Study for term 2 2021. This term we're hearing from the Old Testament prophet Micah. Micah's message exposes corruption, oppression, and sin in God's people. He is a 'prophet of doom'¹ and yet the conclusion of each of his messages of God's judgment is restoration and hope from God. 'The light of God's revelation through Micah exposes the darkness in the city and the nation, but then points out the way back to God and forward into all that he has planned for his people.'²

Through listening to Micah, we pray God will work in our hearts, exposing sin, and drawing us to walk humbly with him through Christ.

¹ Richard D. Phillips, *Jonah & Micah* (Reformed Expository Commentary)

² David Prior, *The Message of Joel, Micah, and Habakkuk* (The Bible Speaks Today)

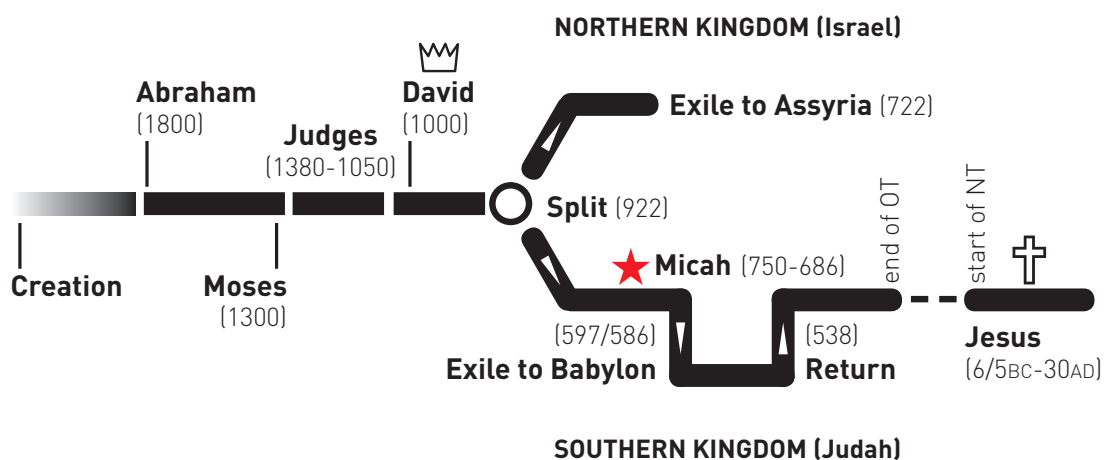
NAVIGATING MICAH



FROM WHOM? The word of the Lord came to Micah, who lived in the town of Moresheth, 35 km South-West of Jerusalem (1:1). Micah's name means, "Who is like Yahweh?" (compare with 7:18).

TO WHOM? The prophetic message of the book is addressed to Samaria and Jerusalem, Jacob and Israel (1:1; 3:1), yet all the peoples of the earth are called to listen and witness the Lord's indictment against his people (1:2; 6:1-2).

WHEN? Micah prophesied in the 8th century BC, during the reigns of the Judean kings: Jotham (750-735 BC), Ahaz (735-715 BC), and Hezekiah (715-687 BC).

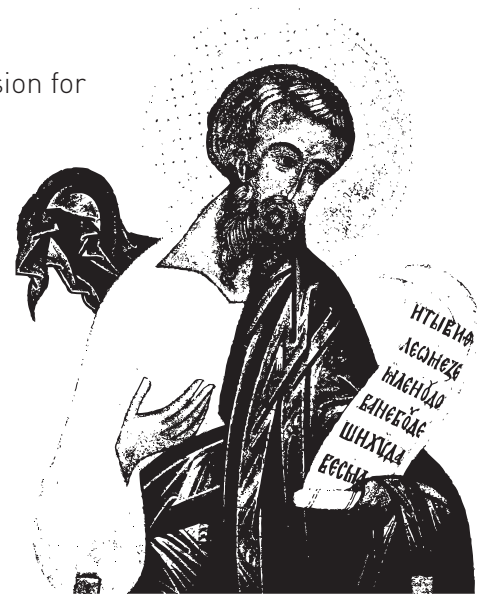


WHY? Micah seeks to set forth God's case against his people, to "declare to Jacob his transgression and to Israel his sin" (3:8). In a time of great affluence and prosperity, Israel and Judah were deeply infected with religious corruption and social injustice. God's leaders – civil, religious and prophetic - had failed to lead righteously, and God's people consequently were consumed by idolatry, violence, and the abuse of the weak and poor.

WHAT? The twin themes of Micah's prophecy are judgement and hope. On account of Samaria and Jerusalem's covenant unfaithfulness, the Lord God promises to bring judgement on his people through their enemies, Assyria and Babylon. Yet in his covenant faithfulness, God also promises to deliver, gather and care for a remnant of his people, in a restored Zion through his Davidic king. From Micah's prophecy, it's clear that the punishing divine judge, Yahweh, is also the gracious and merciful, shepherd king:

"Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity and passing over transgression for the remnant of his inheritance?" (7:18)

We see the prophecy ultimately fulfilled in the one born in Bethlehem, blessed with divine strength and majesty and whose "origins are from old" (5:2): Jesus, the great Lord, judge, shepherd and king. He alone is the true deliverer of everlasting security and peace for his people (e.g. Matthew 2:6; 12:15-21; John 7; 10:16). For no God is like him.



JUDEAN TOWNS OF MICAH 1

Verse	Name	Meaning
1:10	Gath	= "tell"
1:10	Beth-le-aphrah	= "house of dust"
1:11	Shaphir	= "beautiful"
1:11	Zaanah*	= "come out"
1:11	Beth-ezel*	= "house of taking away"
1:12	Maroth*	= "bitter"
1:13	Lachish	= "to the steeds"
1:14	Moresbeth-gath	= "one who is betrothed"
1:14	Achzib	= "deception"
1:15	Mareshah	= "conqueror"
1:15	Adullam	= symbolic of hostility, i.e. David's exile in 2 Sam 23:13

* location unknown



The focus of Micah's prophecy to the Northern Kingdom (1:1, 5, 6)

Reference to the crossing of the Jordan (5:5, cf. Jos 2-5)

Micah's hometown (1:1)

The focus of Micah's prophecy to the Southern Kingdom (1:1, 5, 9, 12; 3:10, 12; 4:2, 8)

The prophesied birthplace of the Messiah (5:2)

The Judean towns singled out for destruction by the Assyrians in 1:10-15 (see the table above & note the wordplay on each disaster)

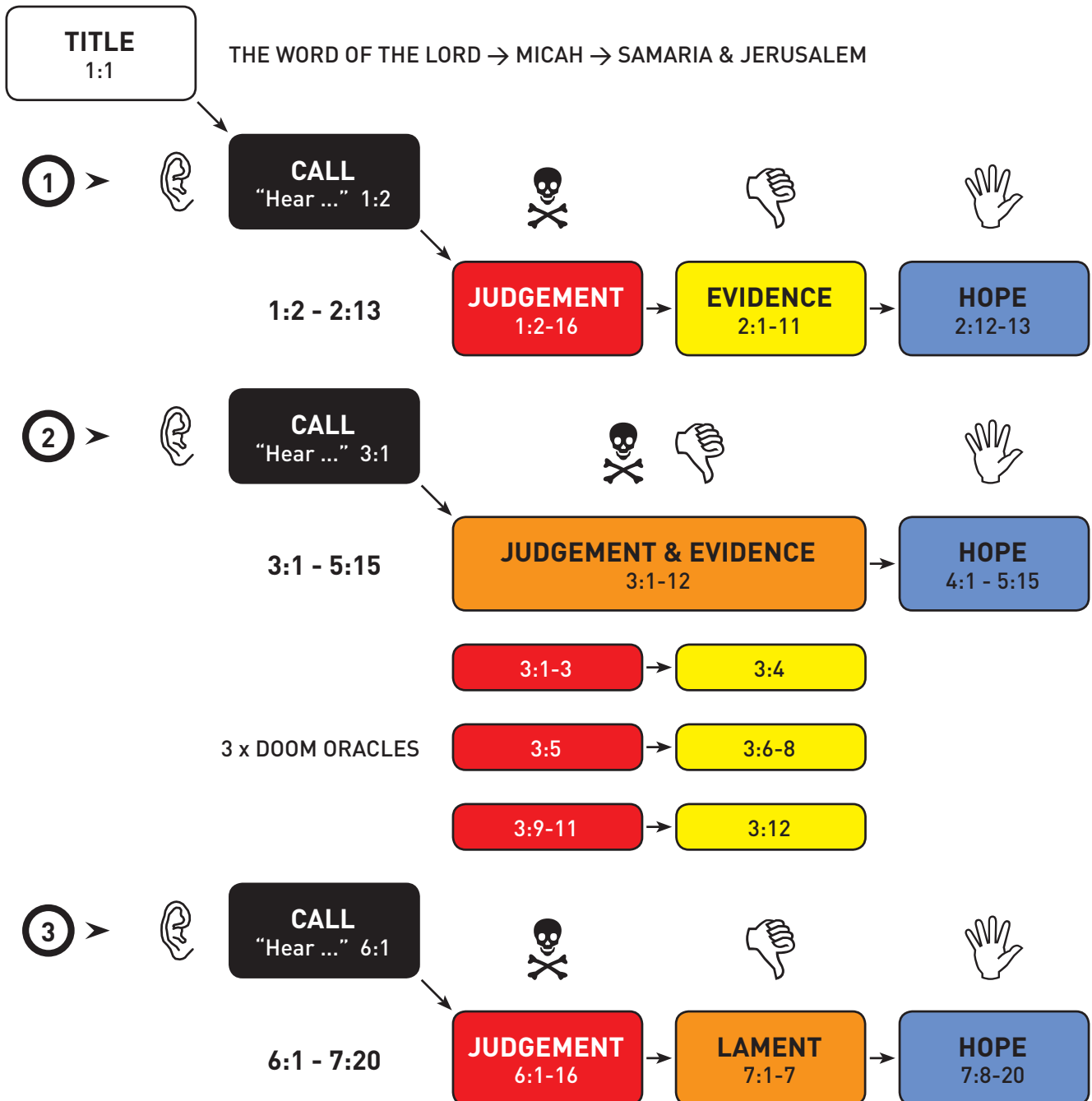
Reference to Balak king of Moab (6:5; cf. Num 22-24)



THE STRUCTURE OF MICAH



After the introductory title (1:1), the book of Micah consists of three cycles of God's *judgement* against his people, including the *evidence* cited for the indictments, before turning to the promise of future *hope* (1-2; 3-5; 6-7). Each cycle is introduced by the refrain to "hear" the word of God (1:2; 3:1 & repeated in 3:9; 6:1).



Study 1: Micah of Morsheth

Read Micah 1:1

In this week's study we're going to dig into the background of Micah - the where, when, and who questions that'll give us context as we study this book over the next 7 weeks.

Activity:

What's the story so far? (Cards with key events/people...put in order).

Observation:

For each other kings mentioned in Micah 1:1, read the summary of their reign from 2 Kings and answer the questions

Jotham

Passage: 2 Kings 15:32-38

Did he 'do what was right in the LORD's eyes'? Yes/No
Successes?

Failures?

Key events during reign?

Ahaz

Passage: 2 Kings 16

Did he 'do what was right in the LORD's eyes'? Yes/No
Successes?

Failures?

Key events during reign?

Hezekiah

Passage: 2 Kings 18:1-16; 20:12-21

Did he 'do what was right in the LORD's eyes'? Yes/No
Successes?

Failures?

Key events during reign?

Geography

Micah sees visions 'concerning Samaria and Jerusalem'. From what we've read in 2 Kings, what do you know about these two cities?

Reflection

From what we've heard about Micah's context, what things do you think might be covered in his prophecy?

What do you notice about how Judah's kings are assessed? What does this teach us about what God values?

Study 2: Unbearable Justice

Last week we got our bearings as looked at the times of Micah's ministry. This week we begin to listen to Micah's message.

Observation

Read Micah 1:1-2

Who is Micah's message addressed to?

Do you think it's going to be good or bad news?

Read Micah 1:3-7

What impression of God do you get from this passage?

In what ways have God's people sinned? And how is God going to respond?

'Do you want the good news or the bad news?' Micah begins with the bad news - God's people have sinned and will be punished. It's rarely easy to be the bearer of bad news, and in the next section we hear how Micah responds.

Read Micah 1:8-16

As Micah weeps over the coming judgment, he sees how God is bringing *poetic justice*. Look again at the places mentioned in vv10-15 and, with the help of the map (page 2) or the *footnotes* your Bible, discuss how God's judgment is fitting?

How would you characterise/summarise how Micah feels about what he's seen? Why do you think he feels this way?

Reflection

As we read Micah 1, we see God's judgment is devastating, both to those receiving judgement and to the prophet. If God's judgment is good and right, Micah's response seems out of place. Yet, Micah is not the only messenger who weeps as he tells of God's judgment.

Read Luke 19:41-44

What does Jesus say will happen to Jerusalem?

How would you characterise/summarise how Jesus feels about Jerusalem's future? Why do you think he feels this way?

In the resurrection of Jesus, God has revealed that he will 'judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed' (Acts 17:31) and on that day, those whose name is 'not found written in the book of life' will be 'thrown into the lake of fire' (Revelation 20:15).

What does this tell us about God?

How do you feel when you hear this? How does your response compare to Micah's and Jesus'?

How could we be growing to have a heart like Jesus?

Study 3: Unhearing Oppressors

In Micah 1 we read about God's punishment coming because of his people's sin of worshipping false gods - idols (1:7). In Micah 2, we continue to hear judgment pronounced as even more of the people's sins are revealed.

Observation

Read Micah 2

Look over the chapter again. What sins does God denounce?

What types of people are mainly impacted by these sins?

Some of the sins in this chapter might seem obscure to us, so we're going to turn back to the law of Moses to see the origin of these laws.

Read Leviticus 25:10, 13-17, 29-30

What is commanded in this law? Why do you think God commanded Israel to do this?

How are people in Micah's day rejecting this law?

Read Deuteronomy 19:14

What is prohibited in this law? Why do you think this is important?

How are people in Micah's day rejecting this law?

Read Micah 2:6-11

How do people in Micah's day treat God's word? How should they respond to God's word?

Read Micah 2:12-13

What is a *remnant*? What hope does God give in these verses?

What do you think is the significance of making promises to *Jacob* and *Israel*?

Reflection

If Micah was to write about our culture, would he rebuke us for the same/similar sins? What about if he were to address Christians...including you?

In Micah God *personally* punishes. His punishment isn't simply the consequences of living in a moral universe. How is this truth both terrifying and comforting?

Read James 5:1-6

When James talks about 'you rich' he may well be talking about wealthy non-believers who are oppressing Christians. But although many of the earliest Christians may have been poor, even slaves, there's hints in James that some wealthy people are believers (e.g. 2:2; 3:13).

What sins of 'you rich' does James denounce?

In what ways do we need to repent of these (or similar) sins?

Read John 10:7-11

Micah 2 closes with a promise that God will gather a remnant 'like sheep in a pen'. How does Jesus, the good shepherd, fulfil this promise?

Micah reveals the sinful hearts of God's people: they don't want to listen to God because they don't want to believe judgment is coming. But God's punishment shows his love—his love for those oppressed by violent and greedy people.

Yet, this chapter finishes with a note of hope. Despite Israel's corruption, God will mercifully keep a remnant.

Study 4: Corrupt Leaders

Way in

What makes for a good leader? What makes someone a bad leader?

So far in Micah we've heard God's rebuke of his people generally, with a particular focus on those who are rich. In Micah 3 the spotlight focusses on the religious and political leaders of God's people.

Observation

Read Micah 3

What sins of Israel political and religious leaders does Micah denounce?

Micah paints a graphic picture of corrupt leaders in vv2-3. What reality do you think this metaphor is describing?

How does God say he will punish the leaders?

In v5 we hear again of the problem of listening to lying prophets. How will God punish both prophets and people?

The chapter ends with a significant warning: the whole nation will suffer because of her leaders' sins. This is a serious warning for those who would take leadership upon themselves, as well as a warning as we consider who we might follow.

Connection

Read Acts 20:28-35

How has Paul's ministry leadership been unlike the leaders of Micah's day?

Paul warns the elders in Ephesus of *savage wolves* coming among them. What will these wolves do to the flock of God?

Read 1 Timothy 3:1-7

Why do you think being an *overseer* in a church a *noble task*?

What are the 'job requirements' for being an overseer? Why do you think these are the qualifications? How are they the same/different from leadership in other contexts?

Reflection

One of the serious punishments God pronounces is silence from him (vv4, 6-7). Why is this an awful punishment? Would God punish a (local) church this way? What would it look like if he did?

What warnings can we take from Micah, Acts, and 1 Timothy as we:

- Appoint people to leadership?

- Choose leaders to follow?

- Become leaders?

Study 5: The Mountain of Peace

In Micah 1-3, we've heard about the state of God's people (Israel and Judah) in the eighth century BC. Micah has revealed their sin and told them God's judgment is coming. In Micah 4, the prophet hands us a telescope and sets our sights on God's future.

Observation

Read Micah 4:1-8

What is the 'mountain of the LORD'? (v1, 2, 7)

Who is gathered to this mountain (v1-2, 6, 8)? Is this something Jewish people reading this would/would not expect and/or welcome?

What will happen when people come to the LORD's mountain? Look over Micah 1-3. how does this vision contrast to how God's people are described in the earlier chapters?

Read 1 Kings 4:25

Micah looks forward to the day when people will 'sit under one's own vine and fig tree'. Seeing that this is how life in Solomon's kingdom is described, what does this tell us about God's promised future?

In the context of the judgments pronounced in chapter 1-2, Micah's vision of sitting under one's own vine and fig tree peacefully in God's presence is an unexpected, but welcome promise. The question remains, when will God bring this to pass?

Connection

Read Luke 14:15-24

In this parable about the kingdom of God, what is surprising about (a) those who turn down the invitation, (b) those who join the feast?

What similarities are there between this banquet's guest list and those Micah pictures coming to the mountain of the LORD?

What does the type of people gathered to this mountain/banquet tell us about God? What might you say God's mission is?

Reflection

Micah envisages a day when non-Jewish people will come streaming in to God, to live in his presence and learn his ways. As the gospel has been proclaimed and grown 'throughout the whole world' (Colossians 1:6) this vision is coming to pass - even in Gympie!

If this is God's mission, what part should we (Gympie Presbyterian Church) be playing? If this is God's future hope, how do we need to change to be part of what God's doing?

The vision of life on God's mountain is of peace with God and others. Do you know this peace?

Study 6: The Shepherd from Bethlehem

Way In

Psalm 23:4 says “Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.” Have you had the experience of walking through a *dark valley*? Did you (or how did you) see God’s comfort during that experience?

In our last study, we heard the great hope of God’s people - the nations streaming in to God’s holy mountain to experience peace with God. As Micah’s message continues, we learn that although the heights of peace will come, first there’s the valley of darkness.

Observation

Read Micah 4:9-5:15

What do you think might be significant about the places (Bethlehem, Assyria, land of Nimrod) mentioned in this passage? (You might find it helpful to read 1 Samuel 16:1, 2 Kings 18:9-11, and Genesis 10:8-12)

How is the situation of God’s people described in this passage? Fill out the table below:

Verse	Situation
4:9	
4:10	
4:11 (also 5:1)	
5:5a	

Although things look dark for God’s people, the future for those people and nations who are against the LORD is even more grim. What does 4:13 and 5:8-9, 15 say will happen to the nations who have attacked God’s people?

And according to 5:10-15, what will happen to God's people who have been unfaithful?

Re-read Micah 5:2-4

What has led to this change in circumstances?

For Micah's first hearers, what would have been significant about *Bethlehem Ephrathah*?

What is surprising about this shepherd?

In Study 1 we looked at Micah's context, the various kings who reigned during his ministry. As Micah speaks about a shepherd-leader from Bethlehem, his hearers probably hoped he was speaking about a king in their day. And although Judah withstood the Assyrian siege in Hezekiah's day (see 2 Kings 19:32-37), when *Nimrod* came, it would be another matter (see 2 Kings 25:8-11).

In Micah's day and in the generations that followed, it may have looked like God's word had failed...until the day some *wise men* from the east (possibly the land of Assyria/*Nimrod*) came to Jerusalem to find king.

Connection

Read Matthew 2:1-12

Why were the priests and scribes so sure of where God's Christ would be born?

How do we see Micah 4-5 fulfilled in this? (Consider Micah 4:13, and the end of Micah 5:4 and start of Micah 5:5)

Read Revelation 19:11-16

There's lots of vivid (and strange) imagery in these verses. What do you think (a) the robe (v13) and (b) the sword (v15) tell us about Jesus?

How does this image of Jesus fit with the promise of the shepherd from Bethlehem (especially Micah 5:5-6, 10-15)?

Reflection

Micah (and John's) visions of God's judgment can be unsettling, but they are also a reminder that the *God who is love* takes sin and evil seriously.

How do you think this prophecy was a *warning* to God's people in Micah's day?

How is this prophecy a *warning* for us today?

How do you think this prophecy would have *comforted* God's people in Micah's day?

How is this prophecy a *comfort* for Christians today?

Study 7: What does the LORD require of you?

Way In

If you were to ask someone what they think God wants/requires from people, what do you think they might say?

Observation

Read Micah 6:1-2

In this chapter, we're taken into a court room to hear the LORD's case against his people. In this scene, Israel is the defendant, God the complainant, Micah his prosecutor/lawyer, and the mountains are called as judge/jury (or maybe the witnesses).

What do you think is the reason for picturing the mountains and the depths of the earth as hearing God's case against his people?

Read Micah 6:3-5

What is the accusation Israel has against God? (v3)

Of what does God remind them in response? (vv4-5) (If you have time, you might like to skim Exodus 2:23-25 and Numbers 22-25.)

Read Micah 6:6-8

In this section Micah takes the complaints of God's people upon his own lips.

What is Israel's complaint? What do they think the LORD requires of them?

What does this complaint tell us about people?

What does God actually require of them?

What does this requirement tell us about God?

Read Micah 6:9-12

How have Israel failed to live as God's people? Why are these things condemned by God?

Read Micah 6:13-16

How does God say he will punish unjust, unmerciful, and proud people?

Reflection

What does this courtroom scene tell us about God?

God's charge isn't directed towards individuals but *my people* as a whole. We don't normally think about sin and punishment in this collective way. In what ways is sin not only an individual problem, but a corporate one as well?

Re-read the complaints God's people raise against him (e.g. v3, v6). Do you see the same heart in Christians today? What about in your own heart?

Re-read the accusations God makes against his people (e.g. vv10-12). Where do you see the same injustice being perpetrated by Christians today? Are there sins you need to repent of?

Read Matthew 6:19-24

Although the wickedness of Israel in Micah's day was more than *love of money* it definitely included this sin. How does Jesus say we should deal with a heart that loves money?

God's indictment against Israel is severe, and if we're honest with ourselves there are times we may feel walking humbly with God is a burden or we may be guilty of loving

money and dealing dishonestly or violently. And God is right to bring judgement on these sins.

The good news, however, is that Jesus came “in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.” (Romans 8:3–4 NIV). Jesus bore the judgment of God, that we might enjoy doing justice, loving mercy, and walking humbly with our God.

Study 8: Though I fall, I will rise

Observation

Read Micah 7:1-7

Verse 1 describes the disappointment of going into a vineyard or orchard looking for fruit, only to discover everything's already been harvested (the cupboard is bare).

In vv2-6, what *fruit* has Micah gone looking for? What has he found instead?

The situation is desperate and lamentable. Why does the prophet not give up hope? (v7)

Read Micah 7:8-13

Although Micah has hope in God hearing his prayer (v7), he knows he (and/or the nation) will 'fall' before he/it 'rises' (v8). Why is this necessary? (v9)

What will happen to those who taunted God's people during the time of punishment? (v10)

What is the long-term hope for the future: for the enemies and for God's people? (vv11-13)

Read Micah 7:14-20

In these final verses, Micah's prayer changes from lament (v1) to petition (v14) as he urges God to act with compassion.

What does Micah pray for God to do for the nations?

What does Micah pray for God to do for his people?

Reflection

Look back over your notes (or flick through Micah). What has our study of Micah taught or reminded you about:

1. God

2. People

Read Luke 1:68-75

Seven hundred (or so) years after Micah, Zechariah celebrates the birth of John (the baptist). By the Spirit he declares God has remembered his covenant-oath made to Abraham (Luke 1:73; compare Micah 7:20).

How is the life of John—and Jesus—the answer to Micah’s prayer (Micah 7:14-20)?

Micah’s message began by calling upon the whole of humanity to witness God’s case against and punishment of his people. We’ve seen the depth and breadth of the sin of Israel. And even still, God’s enduring faithfulness and his heart of compassion and mercy has remained.

God has required justice, faithfulness, and humility of his people, but they’ve been unable to live up to this call. What hope have we got?! Our hope relies on God to hurl our iniquities into the depths of the sea as he sends his shepherd, not only to lead us, but to be the sacrificial lamb for us.