

Explore the Bible Series for May 28: Micah describes the deliverer of Jerusalem

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Micah describes the deliverer of Jerusalem

- Micah 1:1-7:20

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Imagine you live in a place and time where you and your neighbors struggle to make ends meet day after day, year after year. Your political leaders over the past several years have varied from bad to worse. It is certain they have been more concerned with their own well-being than with that of their subjects.

On top of your struggles for existence on the economic level, a great, ferocious empire threatens to overrun your country, bringing devastation, suffering and humiliation. You care little about politics; you just want to live a normal, quiet life.

In addition to everything else, the army threatening to invade will do its best to change your understanding of God and religion. Many neighbors

will undoubtedly go along with the shifting religious winds, on the theory of “go along to get along,” but your understanding of God is important to you and your family. You have no wish to change religions, and you long for deliverance. Where will you turn?



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The prophet Micah was from the village of Moresheth-Gath, southwest of Jerusalem. The invading Assyrian army had forced him and many of his neighbors to abandon their homes and flee for safety to the walled city of Jerusalem.

Micah was quickly disillusioned about the prospect of Jerusalem providing a lasting defense against the enemy. He saw the sins of the people, and especially the rulers, and he encouraged the people to look elsewhere for their deliverance. He believed the kings were weak, corrupt rulers, concerned about the city of Jerusalem, to be sure, but oblivious to the fate of those from rural areas like Moresheth.

Micah saw hope only in a return to the faith of their ancestors, and in particular, he envisioned a time when a new Davidic king would arise to deliver the people. This king would “feed his flock in the strength of the Lord” (5:4); that is, he would care about the common people and about the proper worship of God. His reign would bring security and peace to the nation.

This is the historical setting in which the prophet Micah preached. An

eighth century B.C. contemporary of Isaiah, he spoke for the poor of Judah, the rural and village dwellers, those who felt the effects of King Hezekiah's rebellion against his Assyrian overlord.

Micah 5:2-5

The evangelist Matthew and many other early Christians saw Jesus as the fulfillment of Micah's messianic prophecy, albeit in a spiritual rather than a literal sense. As I ponder this Scripture, I wonder whether people in a situation similar to that of Micah would think of Jesus as their deliverer.

I suspect the typical Iraqi civilian who had suffered at the hands of both Saddam Hussein and U.N. sanctions, only to have their nation occupied by a "Christian" nation, might have a hard time thinking of Jesus as the answer to their prayers for deliverance. The problem is exacerbated, from a theological point of view, when a small number of Christians equate the nation's military victories, whether in Iraq or elsewhere, to Christ's triumph over Muhammad, or other similar sentiments.

All too often Christians in the West have co-opted the Jesus of Scripture—now a conquering hero, leading his faithful troops into battle against the unbelievers. This isn't the Jesus of the New Testament, and it's not the Jesus who can bring hope to the oppressed around the world.

The Jesus we preach should be a Jesus that inspires respect even among those who do not choose to follow him, not one who calls down God's judgment on people of other faiths. Much of the world—industrialized or economically underdeveloped, North or South, Christian or Muslim—has a dangerous, unbiblical, even satanic concept of Jesus. A Jesus who advocates war and violence is the devil wearing a God-mask. We need to reform the image of Jesus we portray to the world, and we can start by remembering the last line of this reading from Micah: "he shall be the one of peace."

Micah 6:1-8

When you fill out an application of almost any sort, there are certain requirements you must meet. If you're applying for enrollment in a particular university, your grades and test scores must meet a set of minimum requirements, say a 3.0 average and a 1200 on the SAT. If you're applying for a job, don't even bother to send in your application if you don't have all the qualifications the company is looking for, because they'll just pull your application out and put it in the circular file (AKA file 13 or le garbage).

If you're applying for a loan, your family income had better be over a specified minimum, and your credit score had better be pretty high as well, or you can say sayonara to the loan. We live in a society that has requirements for almost everything you might want to do, especially if benefits are involved. In fact, the higher the benefits, the higher the requirements, generally speaking.

One could hardly argue with the notion that being in a proper relationship with God is a great benefit, so surely the requirements must be great, right? Surely God requires a certain level or quality of sacrifice (in today's capitalist world, perhaps a specific dollar amount, or more likely, a euro amount) in order to "get in good"? Maybe God also requires we adhere to a certain set of doctrinal precepts?

In fact, God requires neither of these, though a right relationship does require something that is, in a sense, much more demanding. God requires we treat our fellow human beings properly and that we live our lives before God in proper humility.

Micah addressed listeners familiar with the proper sacrifices that the law required them to bring to the temple. Burnt offerings, thanksgiving

offerings, peace offerings, sin offerings, guilt offerings—all these and more were required at certain times of the year or under certain circumstances. The idea behind an offering was God would be pleased by the sacrifice and forgive sin, grant a request or give a blessing. Micah questioned the very heart of their belief system when he challenged them to sacrifice their lives, not their animals. Animal sacrifices weren't bad, as long as they accompanied proper behavior. They were certainly no substitute for right living. Too many people today of all religious persuasions put too much emphasis on either doctrines or peripheral behaviors and put too little emphasis on what Jesus called "the weightier matters of the law" (a probable reference to this passage from Micah).

How else can one explain the fact that many who attend church regularly take no direct action to combat poverty? How else can one explain those who think they are obeying God by killing others in God's name? How else can one explain those who think of themselves as righteous but who have a cavalier attitude about the sufferings of others, particularly if the "others" belong to a different nation, tribe, ethnic group or religion?

To do justice means we must stand up for the underdog, side with the weak and oppose the powerful when they use their power to oppress others. To love kindness means to remember the bond that we share with our fellow humans, a bond that crosses barriers of ethnicity, nationality, language, social status, gender or sexual orientation.

To walk humbly with God means to realize that no matter how certain we are about our beliefs and values, we must always allow for the possibility that we do not have the totality of God's wisdom or truth on our side; in other words, we might be wrong, and our adversaries might be right. If we as people who are serious in our commitment to follow God will observe these "requirements," and if we can persuade our neighbors and governments to do the same, the world will be a much better place.

Micah 7:7-8

Confucius, the ancient Chinese sage, said, "Our greatest glory is not in never falling, but in rising every time we fall." A contemporary wise man, Vince Lombardi, said, "It's not whether you get knocked down. It's whether you get up again." A recent popular song says, "I get knocked down but I get up again?; you're never gonna keep me down.

These sentiments echo the words of the prophet Micah, but with one difference. Micah's determination to get up and keep on going was based not on his own efforts but on his faith in the God who never abandons the faithful.

Discussion questions

- How does Micah's perspective toward Hezekiah and his policies differ from Isaiah's? How do the perspectives of urbanites, suburbanites, people from small towns and people who live in rural areas differ from one another today? Why is it important to understand these differences?
- How does the typical Christian view Jesus? How does the typical Muslim view Jesus? Is the image of Jesus that Christians portray to the Muslim world what we want it to be?
- Which is more important for Christians, orthodoxy (right doctrine) or orthopraxy (right practice)? Is there a minimal standard for correct belief that all Christians should accept? Is there a minimal standard for correct practice all Christians should follow?
- What is the difference between self-determination and reliance on God? Are the two mutually exclusive?



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