

WHO IS LIKE GOD?

Micah 1:3-5, 5:2-5a, 6:6-8

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“It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of light, it was the season of darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way.”

So begins Charles Dickens’ **A Tale Of Two Cities**, considered by some to be the greatest novel ever written in the English language.

Dickens intended to chronicle the spirit of the French Revolution that broke out in the late 1700's, but he could just as well have been writing of another historical period long before, the late 8th Century BC in Israel and Judah.

For what Dickens said about London and Paris is similar to what the prophet, Micah, had to say to Samaria and Jerusalem.

Who was this prophet, Micah?

One place to start is with his name.

Micah was a shortened popular male name in ancient Judah, but its meaning stands tall.

In fact, the name itself captures the theme of his prophetic message.

When his book of poetic and prophetic oracles is compared in size with that of his contemporary, Isaiah of Jerusalem, it is easy to see why Micah is classified as one of the twelve so-called Minor Prophets.

That being said, the brevity of his name, as well as the conciseness of his Book, was anything but minor.

For his name, a four-letter word in Hebrew, *Mika*, essentially is a rhetorical question:

“Who is like Yahweh?”

If Micah’s name suggests his prophetic message, little is known about Micah the person.

This is not that surprising, since the details of the prophets’ lives were not nearly as important as their calling and their obedience in being a voice for the Divine Word in history.

They are remembered for their words from the Living God, and not for their lives.

Micah came from his hometown Moresheth.

Moresheth was a border town, situated about twenty miles southwest of Jerusalem. Because of its location in the rich and fertile southern hill country of Judah, it provided surplus produce, and it served as a strategic border town, protecting Judah's southwest flank from invasion.

To read Micah is to learn much about God.

Yahweh is a God who takes His covenantal promises with His people seriously, who will tolerate no rivals, and who is Sovereign over all the nations.

Yet, Yahweh is also concerned with the plight of His people and their exploitation at the hands of the covetous rich and powerful, with the telling of the truth, with a just society, and the importance of human rights, with the terrible blight of war in the world, and with what it means to be human.

In addition, this God of Israel is not a dispassionate, distant figure, but One who suffers the pain of victims, is furious with their oppressors, and is exasperated with His people because of their failure to respond to His grace.

This is surely a god like no other, great and powerful, and also concerned with matters of mundane reality, like fairness and equity, poverty and wealth, widows and orphans.

There is also another sense in which the rhetorical question posed by Micah's name is not an exclamation of praise, but perhaps a cry of desperation.

Who is like Yahweh?

No one!

That is not just a cry of theological acclaim, but also a cry of lament.

For Micah's people, the people of Judah, or the southern kingdom in the 8th Century, BC, were called to imitate, or be like Yahweh, reflect His character and project His personality to the world by sharing and living God's values, walking with Him, doing justice and being loving.

The children of Yahweh were supposed to be the channel through which God would bless the world, a kingdom of priests for the world.

The Jewish people of God are the beginning — the starting place — for God's salvation project for a world that had hopelessly lost its way.

Unfortunately, Judah, in Micah's time, had also lost its way.

Judah was on its way to becoming a failed state, like today's third world countries, where might became right.

The country was one vast 'Hunger Games,' with the wealthy and mighty elites preying upon the rest of the population.

In his classic book, **The Prophetic Imagination** (1978), which had been gathering dust for too long on my study bookshelf until preparing this message, Old Testament scholar, Walter Brueggemann, suggests that the ancient Jewish prophets, like Micah, were about two things.

Their prophetic ministry included both criticizing and energizing.

The prophets disturb our status quo, questioning the reigning order of things.

They help us to see the normal state of affairs in a different light, and advocate a new way of living in every dimension of life: personal, social, spiritual, economical and political.

As the 20th Century American theologian and ethicist was famous for putting it, “ **[Prophets] afflict the comfortable and comfort the afflicted.**”

Prophets also energized God’s people.

They intended to generate hope, affirm roots, and create a new future.

They weren’t just negative naysayers.

They offered positive affirmation and encouragement.

Yes, the prophets dished out the vinegar, but they also gave us honey for the heart.

Broadly speaking, Micah does this in four ways.

First, he speaks about a remnant.

He prophesied disaster will befall the nation as a whole, but from this time of exile, there would come a remnant.

All will not be lost.

Out of the ruins, God will bring a measure of restoration and renewal.

Micah also points Israel to “the last days,” some time in their future.

In words that echo Isaiah, Micah promises there will come a day when “*many nations*” will come and “*they will beat their swords into plow shares and their spears into pruning hooks.*”

This will be a time of comfort, not critique, of healing, not hell fire, of restoration, not ruin!

This future salvation will include a messiah, or an anointed one, promised by Micah, to come from a town called Bethlehem.

Then Micah gives Israel two of the most memorable passages in all of Scripture.

In the first one, he reminds them of the nature of true religion.

It consists not of outward forms, or rote rituals, but of an inner transformation.

“He has told you, O Mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God” (6:8).

Let us briefly look at the last requirement.

Requirement here does not mean that you do this to get into heaven, or to get God to love you.

Rather, requirements are those things which are crucially important to God.

Focus with me on the word, *'walk.'*

Walk implies slow.

Walk implies measured.

Walking is the opposite of running.

Walking is a slow, deliberate pace.

Now focus on the word, *'humbly.'*

Humbly means not full of yourself or preoccupied with yourself.

Jesus said the greatest person in the Kingdom of God was a person who was humble like a little child.

Jesus said that the greatest of all virtues was humility.

In the New Testament, the followers of Jesus are called the name of Christian only once, but they were repeatedly called servants.

Humility is sacrificing yourself to listen to the needs of others and the desires of God.

Humility is forgetting yourself and your own needs, and focusing on another.

To walk humbly with God is to sacrifice your busy and self-centered self, and focus on others and God.

Micah concludes his Book with a reminder of the never-ending grace of God.

In the last verses of his entire prophecy, he offers the false prophets, drunken religious leaders, corrupt politicians, and greedy merchants a word of forgiveness.

Even today, every year these words are read by Jews on their Day of Atonement:

“Who is a God like you, who pardons sin and forgives the transgression of the remnant of this inheritance?

You do not stay angry forever, but delight to show mercy.

You will again have compassion on us, you will tread our sins underfoot and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea” (7:18-19).

Beloved people of God,

Micah’s last word, then, is not one of prophetic critique.

It is an evocative reminder of the energizing hope that God offers to all of us.

AMEN