

“WHERE IS THE LORD YOUR GOD?”

SERIES: WHO IS A GOD LIKE THEE?

By Doug Goins

Have you ever been ridiculed for your faith in Jesus Christ, especially at a time when you felt vulnerable or as if your spiritual resources were running low? Have you experienced a time when God’s goodness in your life was being challenged by someone in opposition in your Christian faith, and you weren’t feeling very close to the God of your salvation? Perhaps your faith was under attack, and you were having difficulty saying, along with King David,

Bless the Lord, O my soul;
And all that is within me, bless His holy name.
Bless the Lord, O my soul,
And forget none of His benefits. (Psalm 103:1, 2)

That may have been your struggle: You weren’t *sure* about the benefits, and everything within you was churned up, making it difficult to respond to the challenges with any degree of confidence.

In the last message (Discovery Paper #4727) I shared a crisis of faith that I had about 30 years ago. I was angry with God, dealing with tremendous personal loss in my life, in distress. I was wrestling with my own sin at that point, but spending a lot more energy blaming God. I was really struggling to trust him with my life and—I didn’t mention this before—ironically, I was in seminary at that time. I was also working part-time and trying to raise a five-year-old son as a single parent.

The personal attack came from the landlord of my little duplex. This man owned a number of duplexes, most rented to students at Fuller seminary, like myself. He was not a believer, and his wife was battling a very serious illness. One day when I was in the midst of my crisis, he came over and was tremendously insensitive to my spiritual depression. He attacked me, my faith, seminary students in general, Christians and the church. He disdained the idea of a loving God, because if that was true, why was his wife struggling with illness? Sadly, because of my own self-absorption, I didn’t have a response for him.

Studying Micah 6 and 7 brought back this painful memory. God told the people, “Therefore, I will give you up for destruction...,” referring to judgment that was coming, the exile to Babylon. The verse continues, “...and your inhabitants for derision, and you will bear the reproach of My people” (Micah 6:16). They will be publicly shamed and God’s people, who are being violated as a nation, will bear reproach for his name.

In chapter 7, Micah anticipates another future event.

**Then my enemy will see,
And shame will cover her who said to me,
“Where is the LORD your God?”** (Micah 7:10)

Notice that Micah does anticipate restoration and forgiveness. Sin will be dealt with. The thing that triggered their exile and shame—God’s judgment on them as a people—will finally be reversed. And shame will come upon those who challenged and mocked with the question, “Where is the Lord your God?”

We too need to wrestle with this question. Is God in the midst of our circumstances or is he “somewhere out there?” Remember, the questioners in Micah’s day were not asking in an encouraging, supportive tone: “Where is God in your life and what has he been teaching you these days?” Rather, it is a question of derision: “How can you even *believe* in your God?”

This last chapter of Micah, chapter 7, begins very ominously, like a dark sky, but it culminates in brilliant sunshine. The prophet begins his message in lonely isolation, but ends the book with one of the greatest statements of community hope in the entire Old Testament. This has been true throughout this powerful prophetic book. Micah

continues to plead with his people to repent of sin and return to the Lord. He is asking the nation to trust the Lord. The primary call of these final two chapters is to trust the Lord, not *in spite of* difficult circumstances, but *because of* difficult circumstances.

You may have wondered several times in this series why Micah didn't give in to complete pessimism in view of the conditions around him as his nation deteriorated socially. No one was listening to him, and there was very little response to his 30 years of preaching. The answer is found in this last chapter: because of the triumph of faith in Micah's life, he could look *beyond* his deteriorating society to a future hope. He could be completely secure in the promises of God. His closing message is one of encouragement, and we need to hear it as much today as Judah did in the 7th century before Jesus.

Judgment is coming, so trust the Lord!

In the first six verses, Micah challenges the nation because of impending judgment to "trust the Lord!" From verse 7 to the end of the chapter, the challenge is to believe "because of his great mercies." In other words, because he is a merciful God, trust the Lord.

Micah's lament: no godly people remain

The first six verses we'll consider are lament. He is mourning, grieving over the sin that is all around him, much like the lament we looked at in chapter 1. In the first two verses, Micah mourns the lack of godly people in the land.

**Woe is me! For I am
Like the fruit pickers and the grape gatherers.
There is not a cluster of grapes to eat,
Or a first-ripe fig which I crave.
The godly person has perished from the land...**

The "godly person" is literally the person of *hesed*, the term we ran into in chapter 6, meaning lovingkindness or loyal love. There is none of that left in the land.

**And there is no upright person among men.
All of them lie in wait for bloodshed;
Each of them hunts the other with a net.** (Micah 7:1, 2)

The fruit described here, figs and grapes, is a metaphor for the individuals who remain faithful to God in Judah. Micah voices the disappointment that somebody would feel if they're looking for the fruit of godliness in people's lives but can't find it anywhere. He feels isolated and lonely. As I said before, few, if any, people in that country have responded to his message. They haven't responded to the call in chapter 6, verse 8:

[God] has told you, O man, 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?

Micah says that he cannot find any people of integrity, justice and loving loyalty, so he grieves over the universality of evil among his people.

Micah laments corruption

In verses 3-6, Micah laments the corruption in his society. Verses 3 and 4 focus on leadership in the nation.

Concerning evil, both hands do it well [They are ambidextrous when it comes to doing evil].
The prince asks, also the judge, for a bribe,
And a great man speaks the desire of his soul [That's a word for evil desire];
So they weave it together.

**The best of them is like a briar,
The most upright like a thorn hedge.
The day when you post a watchman,
Your punishment will come.
Then their confusion will occur.** (Micah 7:3, 4)

Again, as we have seen in chapters 2, 3 and 6, politicians, judges, and businessmen in the community are working together with tremendous skill. Their corruption had become an art form: fraud, deceit, manipulating the court system, perverting justice for their own advancement, giving no recourse for the weak and defenseless. The phrase in verse 4, “the day when you post a watchman” refers to God’s judgment. He will judge them because of their depravity and their refusal to hear his call to repentance. They haven’t listened to the prophet Micah. Micah has been their watchman standing on the wall, warning them of what is coming, yet they refuse to listen to him. The result, he says, will be confusion in that nation. They prefer lies to truth. The nation is in turmoil now and God’s judgment will eventually come from Babylonian invasion and being taken off into exile.

Micah laments unfaithfulness in relationships

The depth of this moral and spiritual confusion in Judah is seen in the next two verses. Verses 5 and 6 introduce a sad new theme we haven’t heard before about betrayal in the most intimate relationships.

**Do not trust in a neighbor; [Micah warns]
Do not have confidence in a friend.
From her who lies in your bosom
Guard your lips.
For son treats father contemptuously,
Daughter rises up against her mother,
Daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law;
A man’s enemies are the men of his own household.** (Micah 7:5, 6)

Micah laments the fact that the entire social fabric of the nation is unraveling. Unfaithfulness among friends and family members is pervasive. When truth is no longer the standard for society, everything begins to fall apart. In Judah, it had gotten to the point that a person couldn’t trust his best friend anymore. Husbands and wives couldn’t trust each other, and respect for parents had vanished.

If we step back and look at these six verses, it’s helpful to remember that Micah is lamenting the state of affairs in his nation. We live in a very similar time in terms of social disintegration and lawlessness, and the scarcity of people who are really committed to godly “*hesed*,” loving loyalty in relationships, and spiritual integrity. Three things stand out in Micah’s grief and lament.

His example is very similar, as I have said, to the lament we looked at in chapter 1. In neither setting does he try to hide his disappointment. He is painfully honest. Micah is so secure in the fact that God knows him inside out, that he is willing to express his deep sorrow, frustration, loneliness and alienation. In prayer before the Lord, he is lifting this horrible situation up to God. More often than not, in the face of problems like this, I’m am stoic and try to keep a stiff upper lip. I avoid getting in touch with the pain in my own heart, or I just complain and whine about how bad things are—mostly because it disrupts my life! However, we are called to the kind of lament that Micah models for us.

Another aspect of his lament that has touched me at different times through the years is his sense of loneliness and inability to trust other people. Every one of us has probably struggled like that. “Who can I really trust to share this struggle with, this burden, this fear?” And yet, as God’s people, we have to find people of sincere faith who we can ask to help bear the burden and with whom we can be honest about our struggles. We also need people who can share our vision and enthusiasm for ministry.

The third point of personal application in Micah’s lament is the fact that he engages these struggles of life and identifies the good as good and the bad as bad. He refuses to take a pluralistic view of different moral choices and call them all “acceptable alternatives.” He doesn’t just differentiate between the righteous and wicked, but he speaks

out against violence and oppression. He takes a moral stand which, as we've already seen in earlier chapters, makes him very unpopular with certain segments of his society. All of us today who proclaim the name of Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, by default take a stand on positions of crime, sexuality, materialism or the plight of the poor and all other kinds of oppression. We take a stand by what we do and say, as well as by what we do *not* do and do *not* say. How we spend our time and money represents our stand on the same kinds of issues that Micah faced.

Because of His great mercies, trust the Lord!

Like Micah, Jesus cried in disappointment and frustration over the rebelliousness of the people of Jerusalem. Likewise, we too are called to grieve and to pray. That's what Micah does. Beginning in verse 7, Micah looks away from the sins of the people of Israel and he focuses on the faithfulness of God. He chooses to stop looking horizontally and to look vertically instead. The prophet's final appeal to the nation, in verses 7-20, is for the people to trust God because of his great mercies. Verse 7 is the pivot point for the chapter. It's Micah's bridge to hope.

But as for me, [he says, in contrast to all the betrayal among intimates]
I will watch expectantly for the LORD;
I will wait for the God of my salvation.
My God will hear me. (Micah 7:7)

Once Micah shifts his attention to God, instead of all the trouble surrounding him, then a new sense of hope wells up within him. The focus of the remainder of the book is God's sovereign control of life, his unstoppable saving activity. The prophet is going to watch, as he says in verse 7, he will wait and pray. He trusts his savior God to act. He knows that God understands his circumstances and that he will hear Micah's prayer when he calls out to him. God pays attention to his people when they cry to him for help. This verse is very tender and it shows us the depth of Micah's personal relationship and his intimacy with God. Micah's confidence is not just wishful thinking. He can face a future that's frightening and very uncertain, but he can face it with the assurance that God is there with him no matter how difficult and painful the future may be.

The faithful remnant

Beginning in verse 8, Micah is going to speak on behalf of the handful of men and women of faith in Judah, people who are convinced that God has forgiven and will forgive and help them. Verses 8-10 contain a confession of trust in God by this faithful remnant of Jews.

Do not rejoice over me, O my enemy.
Though I fall I will rise;
Though I dwell in darkness, the LORD is a light for me.
I will bear the indignation of the LORD
Because I have sinned against Him,
Until He pleads my case and executes justice for me.
He will bring me out to the light,
And I will see His righteousness.
Then my enemy will see,
And shame will cover her who said to me,
"Where is the LORD your God?"
My eyes will look on her;
At that time she will be trampled down,
Like mire of the streets. (Micah 7:8-10)

These people of faith know that their God is the holy God. They know they are a sinful people, but they express confidence in salvation. God will deliver them from sin and forgive their sin. He will shame those who have mocked them and who have questioned God's sovereign care over them. Their hope is in a God who loves to reverse the established order of things; a God who brings light out of darkness; a God who takes people who know they are sinful, and yet is willing to forgive the sin and declare them righteous; a God who brings triumph out of tragedy and freedom from captivity. High and mighty oppression will be brought low; evil will be judged and punished.

We have already seen in the first eight verses of chapter 4, that God has a future plan for the nation of Israel, when he establishes Jesus' Messianic reign over the whole earth. No temporal event, nothing going on in our life right now, can defeat God's eternal purposes for all of his people. This confession of confidence reflects hope in a time of hopelessness, because the remnant knows that God will establish his eternal kingdom sometime in the future. It will be according to God's timing, and they will be a part of that future.

Because we have a relationship with God in Christ, we can live in the hope of God's sovereign intervention. We can live with the confidence that God will be our advocate. We can be certain that the wait for deliverance will end with rejoicing over our enemies; with light, not darkness. Because God is pleading our case and he is a God of righteousness and justice, we can trust him for forgiveness of sin. We can trust his hand of discipline in our lives when he chooses to judge sin in us, to bring it to our attention. And when he judges rebellion in our lives, we can trust him to bring good out of sinful failure.

This confession of trust is amplified clear through the end of the chapter. In verses 11-20, Micah celebrates the assurance of victory—ultimate victory, the Messianic Kingdom. Verses 11-13 announce a great promise of salvation for Israel: As believers in Jesus, we get folded into the promise as well.

**It will be a day for building your walls,
On that day will your boundary be extended.
It will be a day when they will come to you
From Assyria and the cities of Egypt,
From Egypt even to the Euphrates,
Even from sea to sea and mountain to mountain.
And the earth will become desolate because of her inhabitants,
On account of the fruit of their deeds. (Micah 7:11-12)**

Micah assures the nation that though they will be attacked and destroyed, one day they will be rebuilt. People from all the Gentile nations, pagan nations who have resisted God, will once and for all come to him, and there will be, as verse 13 tells us, universal judgment on the nations who have stood defiantly against God until the end. Evil will once and for all be crushed.

As non-Jewish believers, we are folded into this promise through faith. That promise is consistent throughout both the Old and New Testaments. God promised Abraham: "I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse. And in [Abraham and his seed] all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Genesis 12:3).

The prophet Amos announced: "'In that day, I will raise up the fallen booth of David, and wall up its breaches; I will also raise up its ruins, and rebuild it as in the days of old; that they may possess the remnant of Edom and all the nations who are called by My name,' declares the LORD who does this" (Amos 9:11-12).

We are part of those Gentile nations who are being drawn in. The apostle Paul explained this in the context of explaining God's future plans and purposes for the people Israel: "What shall we say then? That Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, attained righteousness, even the righteousness which is by faith..." (Romans 9:30).

In his letter to the Galatians, Paul summarizes all of this great salvation history of folding Gentiles into the Jewish remnant:

**Even so Abraham BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS RECKONED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS.
Therefore, be sure that it is those who are of faith that are sons of Abraham. And the Scripture,
foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham,
saying, "ALL THE NATIONS SHALL BE BLESSED IN YOU." So then those who are of faith are
blessed with Abraham, the believer. (Galatians 3:6-9)**

We who "are of faith" are part of that blessing.

In Amos 9, the inclusion of the Gentiles is rooted in this future era of peace when Israel's fortunes are finally restored. That day has not yet come. In light of this great promise, Micah lifts his heart to the Lord in intercession

for the nation. Chapter 7, verse 14 is a prayer for God's shepherding hand to restore his people. Micah cries out to God,

**Shepherd Thy people with Thy scepter,
The flock of Thy possession
Which dwells by itself in the woodland,
In the midst of a fruitful field.
Let them feed in Bashan and Gilead
As in the days of old. (Micah 7:14)**

Micah is really asking God to do it *right now*. He asks God, as the divine shepherd-king of his people, to take charge of his own flock by graciously ruling over them. This is Micah's third reference to God's leading as a shepherd. In both of the preceding references, the shepherd is Messiah. Back in chapter 2, Jesus as Messiah was pictured as a shepherd gathering the remnant like sheep in a fold, like a flock in the midst of its pasture. In verse 4 of chapter 5, he is pictured as a Messiah who will rule Israel and shepherd his people through God's strength.

Micah's prayer here is for God to give his people care and provision. He wants God to restore his intimate covenant relationship with the people. He says, "You chose them; they're your inheritance; they're your possession." He wants them to live in security and in plenty as they had done, he says, "in the days of old" (in the early days when they were first given the land of Canaan, when they had Gilead and Bashan, places of provision). "We want to go back there, Lord. Give us security. Give us safety."

In the literary flow of the chapter, it is interesting that God doesn't allow Micah to finish the prayer. It's as if God bursts in and interrupts Micah's prayer. God answers Micah, and promises to exercise his power. "Remember I did save you in the past and I will save you in the future—you can count on that." Micah had said "as in the days of old when we came into the land" and God interrupts,

**As in the days when you came out from the land of Egypt,
I will show you miracles" [I'll take you back even further! I'll do the miracles of the exodus for you again!].
Nations will see and be ashamed
Of all their might.
They will put their hand on their mouth,
Their ears will be deaf.
They will lick the dust like a serpent,
Like reptiles of the earth.
They will come trembling out of their fortresses;
To the LORD our God they will come in dread,
And they will be afraid before Thee. (Micah 7:15-17)**

God reiterates the incredible acts of salvation in the past, the exodus from Egypt. He performed signs and wonders then and he will do the miraculous again. He doesn't tell Micah here what those miracles will be, but salvation history shows that God is always doing new, unique, creative things. As he has done before, he will deliver his people from their sinfulness and also from the military strength of other nations who oppose them. The future, he says, will be different from this point on. When God miraculously intervenes on behalf of his people, the nations that oppressed them will see his power and they will be ashamed at their puny attempts to try to stand up against God. They will finally be speechless. They won't mock God or his people anymore.

This reminder about God's mighty saving activity both past and future offers a new way of looking at the social disintegration of the nation of Judah in Micah's day. It really demands that the people think differently as they look at present circumstances. This is an important principle for us as well. *The future is determined by what God has done and what God will do, not what the evil people in society are doing now.* There is rebellion and violent destruction against God's people and the work of his kingdom, but that is only for a season. In God's timing, those enemies of the kingdom of God will end up "licking the dust," fearing God in his glory. Though we are surrounded by difficult circumstances, if we are willing to wait and watch with hope, anticipating what God will do, and actively pray, we will eventually rejoice because God is our light. He is our salvation as we already saw in verses 7-

God's promises never fail and his awesome power is unlimited. That's Micah's conviction. In verse 13, and again in verses 16 and 17, God has promised that he will ultimately triumph. He will have victory over all evil influence in the world. There is another wonderful shift in verses 18-20. This is another hymn celebrating the triumph of God; his loving victory over his own people, a victory of grace. Mercy triumphs over judgment.

**Who is a God like Thee, who pardons iniquity
And passes over the rebellious act of the remnant of His possession?
He does not retain His anger forever,
Because He delights in unchanging love.**

Again, we see God's "*hesed*," loyal love. That's who he is. That's what delights his heart.

**He will again have compassion on us;
He will tread our iniquities under foot.
Yes, Thou wilt cast all their sins
Into the depths of the sea.
Thou wilt give truth to Jacob
And unchanging love to Abraham [*hesed* again],
Which Thou didst swear to our forefathers
From the days of old. (Micah 7:18-20)**

The prophet ends with absolute confidence in the unchanging character of God. Micah's first question in verse 18, "who is a God like Thee..." is really an exposition of his own name. Micah is the English version of *Mikayah*, the Hebrew word, which means, "who is like Yahweh."

My wife Candy and I named our son Micah because of our love for that name, and we've reminded Micah through the years that in Jesus Christ, he could grow up to be a man who really reflects God. We pray that for all four of our kids. And in reality, all of us can live a life of godliness such that if someone asks, "Who is like Yahweh?" people will reply: "My friend [*your name here*] is like Yahweh. His/her life reflects God's character and beauty."

Twice in Micah's hymn we are told of God's *hesed* toward his people. He said in the last chapter that that is his greatest attribute in the Old Testament. We see here that he wants to give it to us, to build it into our lives so we can be people who reflect who he is.

Psalm 103 proclaims God's *hesed*. It's who he is.

For as high as the heavens are above the earth,
So great is his loving kindness [*hesed*] toward those who fear him.
As far as the east is from the west,
So far has He removed our transgressions from us...
But the lovingkindness of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear Him,
And His righteousness to children's children,
To those who keep His covenant,
And who remember His precepts to do them.
(Psalm 103:11-12, 17-18)

Our God is one who pardons sin and forgives transgressions, who delights in showing mercy. He shows compassion to his people and he deals with their sins in finality.

Micah knew that God wouldn't go back on his promises or his covenant agreement with his people. The people hadn't always been true to him, but God would always be true to his people. The apostle Paul expressed the same truth in his second letter to the young pastor Timothy. The context of this statement is salvation in Jesus Christ, and with it eternal glory. It's about our position in Christ, and we can claim the promise:

For if we died with Him, we shall also live with Him;
If we endure, we shall also reign with Him;
If we deny Him, He also will deny us [if we once and for all reject his love in Jesus, he'll deny us,
but...];
If we are faithless, [a weak, struggling faith] He remains faithful; for He cannot deny Himself. (2
Timothy 2:11-13)

No matter what our struggles are, he is loyally committed to us. What he promised to Abraham, the father of the nation, God will fulfill in Abraham's many spiritual descendants, including us. Micah could have sung at this point: "How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord is laid for your faith in his excellent Word." (1) In the coming of Jesus Christ to the world, God fulfilled some of the promises he made to the Jews, but all of the spiritual promises he made to humanity.

There is a beautiful Christmas hymn in the first chapter of Luke, part of the birth narrative. When John the Baptist is born, his father Zacharias makes a beautiful prophetic statement about Jesus in fulfillment of all the promises in the covenants. Zacharias says,

Blessed be the Lord God of Israel,
For He has visited us and accomplished redemption for His people,
And has raised up a horn of salvation for us
In the house of David His servant—
As He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from of old—
Salvation FROM OUR ENEMIES
And FROM THE HAND OF ALL WHO HATE US
To show mercy toward our fathers,
And to remember His holy covenant,
The oath which he swore to Abraham our father,
To grant us that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies,
Might serve Him without fear,
In holiness and righteousness before Him all our days.
(Luke 1:68-75)

The apostle Paul wrote, "For no matter how many promises God has made, they are 'yes' in Christ Jesus." (2 Corinthians 1:20, NIV)

The better we know the character of God, the more we can trust him for the future. The better we know the promises and covenants of God, the more internal peace we'll have when things around us are falling apart. When Micah wrote this hymn of God's victory, the future seemed completely hopeless. Yet this confession of faith is full of confidence because Micah knew God and could trust him completely.

For each of us, no matter how dark the day, how ominous the clouds, God's promises are still shining. No matter how confusing or frightening our circumstances, the character of God does not change—he remains the same. We have every reason to trust him. In Christ, he is still our wonderful, merciful Savior.

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NOTES:

(1) "How Firm A Foundation," Rippon's *Selections of Hymns*, © 1787.

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