

MICAH 6-7

**BOOK OF CONTENTION
AND CONCILIATION**

What YHWH seeks from you

¹Hear what YHWH says ... Rise, plead your case before the mountains, and let the hills hear your voice. ²Hear, you mountains, the YHWH's dispute, and you enduring foundations of the earth! For YHWH has a dispute with his people, and he will contend with Israel.

³"O my people, what have I done to you? In what have I wearied you? Answer me! ⁴I brought you up from the land of Egypt, and redeemed you from the house of slavery; and I sent before you Moses, Aaron, and Miriam.

⁵O my people, remember now what King Balak of Moab devised, and how Balaam son of Beor answered him, and what happened from Shittim to Gilgal, that you may know the saving acts of YHWH."

⁶"With what shall I come before YHWH, and bow myself before God on high? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings of year old calves? ⁷Will YHWH be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?"

⁸He has told you, man. What is good? and what is YHWH seeking from you? To do justice, to love the covenant commitment, and to walk humbly with your God?

In verse 1, Micah begins by summoning Israel to listen. They have a case to answer and are to hear what YHWH has to say. In the rest of verse 1 Micah seems to be addressing YHWH, inviting him to present his case in the presence of the mountains, who, in verse 2, in their role as 'enduring foundations of the earth', are summoned to witness the accusation YHWH is bringing against his people.

YHWH opens his case in a beautifully conciliatory way (verses 3-5). Whatever he has against 'my people' he wants them to remember how he freed them from Egypt (verse 4), and sided with them when they were east of the Jordan, and made it possible for them to set out from their last camp (Shittim), cross the Jordan, and enter the Promised Land where their first camp was at Gilgal (verse 5).

In verses 6-7 Micah lists how Israel is not to respond to YHWH. He places the list on the lips of a concerned member of the people. The list of sacrifices considered reaches its climax in the sacrifice of the eldest son, the one nearest and dearest to the person making the sacrifice, the nearest one can get to sacrificing oneself. YHWH is not asking for any of the sacrifices listed. None of them can fend off the accusation YHWH is going to bring.

The only sacrifice that is appropriate is spelled out in verse 8. 'O man' gives verse 8 a universal application. Earlier the leaders were accused of hating good (3:2), and the people were challenged to seek good (5:14). Here 'good' is defined as that which YHWH wants from them. Micah lists three things. They are to 'do justice'. This is in stark contrast to the behaviour castigated in 2:2. They are to 'love', that is to say, choose and be faithful to, the covenant commitment which they have with YHWH (Hebrew *hesed*). Hosea expresses the essence of this covenant-love in 2:19-20 (see also Hosea 6:6). The word translated 'humbly' appears only here in the Hebrew Bible. Some suggest 'mindfully' may be a better translation. Either way the key point is to 'walk with your God'. A parallel can be drawn with Jesus response to the scribe (see Mark 12:29-30), and with Paul's injunction to 'do the truth with love'(Ephesians 4:15).

It is difficult to offer a confident translation of verse 9 – a difficulty experienced as early as the Greek Septuagint Version. In the light of the mention of Omri and Ahab in verse 16, the unnamed ‘city’ may be Samaria. One can only hazard a guess as to the meaning of the last sentence in verse 9.

In verses 10-12 we have a summary of the accusations that we have been expecting since the opening verse of this chapter. The focus is on injustice. The details can be filled out from chapters 2-3. The city merchants are among those being castigated.

The punishment is announced in verses 13-15. Verse 15 is aimed at the country landowners.

Verse 16 seems to have the various classes of leadership in view (as in chapters 2-3).

⁹The voice of YHWH! He is calling to the city. And it is wisdom to fear your name. Hear, O tribe! And who appointed her still?

¹⁰Are there the treasuries of wickedness in the house of the wicked? And the fraudulent ephah in the detested city? ¹¹Can I tolerate wicked scales and a bag of dishonest weights? ¹²Your wealthy are full of violence; your inhabitants speak lies, and their tongue is deceitful in their mouths.

¹³Therefore I have begun to strike you down, making you desolate because of your sins. ¹⁴You will eat, but not be satisfied, and there will be a gnawing hunger within you; you will put away, but not save, and what you save, I will hand over to the sword. ¹⁵You will sow, but not reap; you will tread olives, but not anoint yourselves with oil; you will tread grapes, but not drink wine.

¹⁶For you have kept the statutes of Omri and all the works of the house of Ahab, and you have followed their policies. Therefore I will make you a desolation, and your inhabitants an object of hissing; so you will bear the reproach of my people.

¹Woe is me! For I have become like one who, after the summer fruit has been gathered, after the vintage has been gleaned, finds no cluster to eat; there is no first-ripe fig for which I hunger.

²The faithful have disappeared from the land, and there is no one left who is upright; they all lie in wait for blood, and they hunt each other with nets.

³Their hands are skilled to do evil; the official and the judge ask for a bribe, and the powerful dictate what they desire; thus they pervert justice. ⁴The best of them is like a brier, the most upright of them a thorn hedge. The day of their sentinels, of their punishment, has come; now their confusion is at hand.

⁵Put no trust in a friend, have no confidence in a loved one; guard the doors of your mouth from her who lies in your embrace; ⁶for the son treats the father with contempt, the daughter rises up against her mother, the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; your enemies are members of your own household.

In verse 1 the prophet compares himself to a hungry person who can find nothing to eat, from the beginning of the season right through to its end. The rest of the passage explains that it is justice that he is hungry for, but the corruption in society (already detailed in 6:10-13) is such that there has been a complete breakdown of integrity at the highest levels of government (verses 3-4; see 3:11), as well as a complete breakdown of trust in the family (verses 5-6).

Verse 2 finds an echo in Jeremiah:

Run to and fro through the streets of
Jerusalem, look around and take note!
Search its squares and see if you can
find one person who acts justly and
seeks truth— so that I may pardon
Jerusalem.

– Jeremiah 5:1

In verse 6 the hostility is from the younger generation to the older one (as in Matthew 10:35). In Luke 12:52, the hostility goes both ways. Nothing is said about hostility from a son-in-law to his parents-in-law, because a wife's parents did not live in the same household as their married daughter.

As the previous verses have made clear things are in a desperate state. In verse 7 the prophet declares that his hope (his only hope) lies in YHWH.

Speaking, as it seems, for Zion, Micah addresses Judah's enemies. The sentiments of verses 8-12 are close to those of the Book of Lamentations. This, among other considerations, has led some scholars to attribute this passage to a scribe who has including this in the Micah scroll after the fall of Jerusalem in 597. It is, however, just as likely that the sentiments of the author of Lamentations drew on passages such as this, inherited from the past.

Zion accepts the justice of divine punishment and continues to believe in the justice of YHWH. The punishment of Jerusalem was just, so will her restoration be when the punishment is complete (verse 9; compare Isaiah 40:1).

The fact that YHWH's punishment of Israel is just does not justify the action of Israel's enemies and the prophet looks forward to their downfall.

The Hebrew of verses 11-12 either expresses the disjointed feelings of the author, or the text has been corrupted in transmission. The Septuagint differs markedly from the Hebrew. Hezekiah had an ambitious building program

Verse 12 paints an eschatological picture of a restored Israel. The first mention of 'Egypt' uses an unusual word. Some scholars think the text is referring to Tyre.

⁷And as for me, I will watch for YHWH, I will wait for the God of my salvation; my God will hear me.

⁸Do not rejoice over me, O my enemy; although I fell, I got up again. When I will sit in darkness, YHWH will be a light to me.

⁹I must bear the indignation of YHWH, because I have sinned against him, until he concludes his case against me and completes my punishment. He will bring me out to the light; I will see his justice.

¹⁰Then my enemy will see, and shame will cover her who said to me, "Where is YHWH your God?" My eyes will see her downfall; now she will be trodden down like the mire of the streets.

¹¹A day for the rebuilding of your walls! In that day the boundary shall be far extended.

¹²In that day they will come to you from Assyria and Egypt, and from Egypt as far as the River, from sea to sea and from mountain to mountain.

Vindication

¹³And the land will be desolate because of its inhabitants, for the fruit of their evil deeds.

¹⁴Shepherd your people with your staff, the flock that belongs to you, which lives alone in woodland in the midst of Carmel. Let them graze in Bashan and Gilead as in the days of old, ¹⁵as in the days when you came out of the land of Egypt.

I showed him marvellous things.

¹⁶Let the nations see them, and let them be ashamed of all their might. Let them put their hand over their mouth; let their ears not hear.

¹⁷Let them lick dust like a snake, like the crawling things of the earth; let them come trembling out of their fortresses. Let them dread El YHWH our God, and let them be afraid of you.

¹⁸Who is a God like you? – pardoning iniquity and passing over the treachery of the remnant of your possession, who does not retain his anger forever, because he delights in showing clemency.

¹⁹He will again have compassion upon us; he will tread our iniquities under foot. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea.

²⁰You will show faithfulness to Jacob and unswerving loyalty to Abraham, as you have sworn to our ancestors from the days of old.

Verse 13 picks up again the desolation experienced by Israel because of her failure to do what 6:8 expresses so well (compare 6:16).

In verses 14-15 the prophet on Israel's behalf appeals to YHWH as Israel's shepherd.

The second sentence in verse 15 appears to be a statement from YHWH agreeing that he revealed 'marvellous things' 'in the days of old' when he led his people out of Egypt.

In verses 16-17 Micah prays that the nations will see YHWH's marvellous deeds. Micah is confident that if they did witness YHWH's power they would be overwhelmed with 'the fear of YHWH'.

Verse 18 is echoed in the credal statement of Exodus 34:6-7.

YHWH, YHWH, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness ... forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin.

See also 2Chronicles 30:9; Joel 2:13; Jonah 4:2; Lamentations 3:32; Daniel 9:4; Nehemiah 9:17; Psalms 86:15, 111:4, 145:8 and Psalm 103.

It is significant that YHWH's covenant love (*hesed*) occurs twice in the final two verses of Micah (translated 'compassion' in verse 19, and 'unswerving loyalty' in verse 20). Micah has had much to criticise, but as a true prophet he never takes his eyes off YHWH, Israel's faithful and loving God.