

III. *Prodigal People*

18-Dec-05 Micah 2:1-13

Theme: Although God will send His people into exile for their sins, there remains a remnant who will experience God's gracious restoration.

Key Verses: Micah 2:12-13 ¹²I will surely assemble all of you, O Jacob, I will surely gather the remnant of Israel; I will put them together like sheep of the fold, like a flock in the midst of their pasture; they shall make a loud noise because of so many people. ¹³The one who breaks open will come up before them; they will pass out, pass through the gate, and go out by it; their king will pass before them, with the LORD at their head.

Review

Last week we studied Micah chapter 1 – *coming calamity*. The chapter is divided in half. In the first half, Micah describes a *terrifying theophany* – the Lord coming out of His holy temple in judgment. As He descends from heaven to earth, the mountains melt and the valleys split in awe at His coming. Although he doesn't use the term, Micah is describing the Day of the LORD, the day when God comes to judge and inspect His people. God finds the northern kingdom of Israel wanting because of their idolatry and spiritual apostasy. Thus, God decrees that Samaria will be destroyed. This destruction was carried out by the Assyrians in 722 BC, only a few years after Micah gave this message. However, lest the inhabitants of Jerusalem feel like they escaped God's wrath, Micah informs them that the disease of idolatry which destroyed Samaria has also infected the people of Judah. Unless they join him in mourning their sin, their fate will be the same as their northern sister.

The second half of Micah chapter one is a travelogue through *twelve towns* of Judah. Micah uses Hebrew puns and play on words to illustrate that calamity is also coming to Judah. Micah then urges the inhabitants of Jerusalem to engage in deep and sincere mourning for their sins. It is the only way they can turn aside the wrath of God. To their credit, it appears as if the inhabitants of Jerusalem, led by the godly king Hezekiah, heeded the words of Micah. Although Sennacherib did invade the land and overrun the towns of the Shephelah described by Micah, they were stopped at the gates of Jerusalem. God heard the prayers of Hezekiah and granted the city of Jerusalem another 100+ years of existence.

Like most of the prophets, Micah chapter 1 reminds us of the holiness of God and His pure hatred towards the sin of His people. Let us learn from Micah 1 the awfulness of sin, the nearness of God, and the promise of forgiveness if we repent and mourn our sins.

Introduction

Micah chapter 2 continues to remind us of the consequences of sin. In this chapter, specific sins are described and specific punishment is outlined. However, the chapter ends differently than we might expect. The last two verses of chapter 2 end in hope and restoration, as God addresses His remnant. Thus, I've named this lesson *Prodigal People* to emphasize that sinful people can return to God and be received by Him.

The chapter is divided into three main sections. In the first section (2:1-5), the vain plots of men are overturned by God, who *devises disaster* for sinners. In the second section (2:6-11), the

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prattling prophets are exposed as the puppets of those who practice lawlessness. Finally, the third section (2:12-13) describes the *regathered remnant* under the leadership of Jesus Christ.

Exposition

A. Devising Disaster (2:1-5)

1. Devious Devising (2:1-2)

Micah chapter 1 starts out in the heavenly places. We see the Lord coming forth from His holy temple, from the seat of His power, from the center of His Holiness. Chapter 2 starts out in a completely opposite location. Instead of heavenly glory and holiness, we are exposed to earthly evil and corruption. Instead of witnessing the righteous power of a sovereign God over His creation, we see the petty power that sinful men exert over their exploited brethren. From the heights of God's perfection we go to the depths of man's depravity. From the *sanctum sanctorum* of the Lord we visit the inner chamber of man's iniquity. It's not a pretty sight.

The rich men of Micah's day are portrayed as plotting against their fellow man. It is a *devious devising*. Micah says, **Woe to those who devise iniquity, and work out evil on their beds!** (v. 1a). They lay awake at night dreaming of their wicked plans. Their plans consume all of their waking moments and even at night they continue their plotting. Allen points out that in the Psalms "one's bed is the place in which to indulge in private thoughts and aspirations for which the bustle of daily life leaves little opportunity." For example:

⁶*When I remember You on my bed, I meditate on You in the night watches* (Ps. 63:6).

⁶*I am weary with my groaning; all night I make my bed swim; I drench my couch with my tears* (Ps. 6:6).

However, the Psalms also show us the same picture that Micah gives us:

¹An oracle within my heart concerning the transgression of the wicked: there is no fear of God before his eyes. ²For he flatters himself in his own eyes, when he finds out his iniquity and when he hates. ³The words of his mouth are wickedness and deceit; he has ceased to be wise and to do good. ⁴*He devises wickedness on his bed; he sets himself in a way that is not good; he does not abhor evil* (Ps. 36:1-4).

About the only positive thing you can say about these men that Micah writes about is that they are not lazy. They get up at the crack of dawn to implement their plans. They are most efficient in carrying out their *devious devisings*: **At morning light they practice it, because it is the power of their hand** (v. 1b).

What do these sinful men do? They **covet, take, seize, and oppress** (v. 2). Practically speaking, they enrich themselves at the expense of others. They show no compassion on those less fortunate but ruthlessly act to evict fellow citizens from their property. This is the inevitable result of the idolatry Micah condemns in chapter 1. When you create a god in your own image, you place yourself at the center of the universe. Nobody else matters – you can justify stepping on the little people to further your own career and self-interests.

There are two key verbs in verse 2 that echo backwards and forwards throughout Scripture. One of them is "seize." This is the essence of the first sin in the Bible. Adam and Eve "seized" the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. They took what was not rightfully theirs to take. By seizing the forbidden fruit, they were defying God and placing themselves at the center

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instead of Him. This sin has been replicated in many different ways throughout Biblical history and into our present day. But the essence is always the same: seizing what is not rightfully yours. Contrast the attitude of Adam and Eve, of these evil men of Judah, with our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ:

⁵Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: ⁶who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped [*seized*], ⁷but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. ⁸And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross! ⁹Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Phil 2:5-11, NIV).

Christ is the only one who could rightfully “seize” deity, since He Himself was God. And yet, He did not seize it, but waited patiently until He fulfilled the will of God and was exalted in due time.

The second key verb is the root of all this seizing. It is the word “covet.” **Covet** reminds us of the Tenth Commandment and God’s command for us to be satisfied with what we have. “The Tenth Commandment reveals that sin is essentially a matter of the heart, for coveting is something that exists internally long before it expresses itself in any outward action” (Boice). Because these evil men had evil, covetous desires, their inward sinful attitudes were enacted in outward sinful actions towards their fellow man.

Once you begin coveting, it is a slippery slope towards seizing and oppressing. The people of Judah should have known better. They had the Scriptures. They had the example of Samaria. The prophet Amos had condemned the rich of the northern kingdom for exactly the same sins:

⁶Thus says the LORD: “For three transgressions of Israel, and for four, I will not turn away its punishment, because they sell the righteous for silver, and the poor for a pair of sandals. ⁷They pant after the dust of the earth which is on the head of the poor, and pervert the way of the humble [oppressed] (Amos 2:6-7a).

What had happened to the rich men of Samaria? They had been dragged away in captivity, perhaps just a handful of years before Micah wrote this message. Let Micah’s message serve as a warning for us in our day. The slope from coveting to seizing is slippery. Let us be content with what God gives us and not be jealous of our neighbors.

2. Divine Devising (2:3-5)

While the men of Judah engage in their *devious devising*, God has a counter-plan. Verses 3-5 tell us about *divine devising*. Verse 3 directly echoes and contrasts the devious devising with the divine devising. The first echo we clearly see is God **devising disaster**, while the men of v. 1 **devise iniquity**. How foolish is it for us to think we can plot against God in the secret places of our heart and be able to hide it from Him! God is not fooled – nothing can be hid from Him.

The second echo is in the word “evil.” The men of Judah **work out evil**. They are plotting evil against others. In contrast, God is working out a righteous and holy judgment upon them because it is **an evil time**. Prior gives a good explanation of this concept:

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Regarding *evil*, the sense would seem to be that, when people behave toward God in a way that He regards as evil, God's response is to behave towards them in a way that they regard as evil. The point is that rebellious humanity and God have entirely different definitions of what is evil and offensive. We deem evil anything which impairs our convenience and comforts; God deems evil anything which ignores His commandments and character.

The third echo is in the phrase "this family." God will bring judgment upon **this family** because the men of Judah have oppressed **a man and his house**.

Verse 4 illustrates God's judgment in a poetical fashion. It is in the form of a proverb or a "taunt-song." The purpose of this taunt-song is to illustrate that the punishment fits the crime. This is an example of the *lex talionis*, the Biblical principle of "an eye for an eye." What were these men guilty of? Plotting to seize others' property by force and oppressing the less fortunate by disinheriting them from their property rights. What was the punishment they were going to receive **in that day**? They were going to have their property violently seized from them and given to others.

The extent of this reversal of fortune is explained in verse 5: **Therefore you will have no one to determine boundaries by lot in the assembly of the Lord** (v. 5). The underlying principle of the Israelite economy was that all of the Land ultimately belonged to the Lord. However, He graciously provides it for His people in perpetuity. In the book of Joshua, lots are cast in the assembly to divide the land up amongst the people (Jos. 14*ff.*). It was understood that the land was to stay in the family line through succeeding generations.

However, circumstances such as famine, war, or debt could result in the land transferring to another family for a time until the Year of Jubilee. Celebrated every fifty years, the Year of Jubilee was a year in which debts were retired, indentured servants were released, and land was returned to the original owner:

¹³In this Year of Jubilee, each of you shall return to his possession. ¹⁴And if you sell anything to your neighbor or buy from your neighbor's hand, you shall not oppress one another. ¹⁵According to the number of years after the Jubilee you shall buy from your neighbor, and according to the number of years of crops he shall sell to you. ¹⁶According to the multitude of years you shall increase its price, and according to the fewer number of years you shall diminish its price; for he sells to you according to the number of the years of the crops. ¹⁷Therefore you shall not oppress one another, but you shall fear your God; for I am the LORD your God (Lev. 25:13-17).

The Year of Jubilee was God's provision against coveting, seizing, and oppressing others. Notice the reason in Lev. 25:17 – "Therefore you shall not *oppress* one another, but you shall *fear* your God; for I am the LORD your God." What were the men of Judah doing in Micah's day? Seizing land, not returning it, and oppressing others – in direct violation of God's gracious provisions.

Therefore, God tells these "robber barons" in Micah 2:5 that they will be excommunicated from the assembly of God. They have no place amongst God's people. When the time comes to reallocate the land to its proper owners, they will not be numbered among the assembly of God. Their inheritance will be lost forever and given to others.

This section of Scripture is a warning to us. Don't think that you can hide your sinful motives and actions from the Lord of Heaven. The New Testament tells us:

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⁷Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap.
⁸For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life (Gal. 6:7-8).

The men of Judah were sowing oppression and they were going to reap eternal damnation. Instead of oppressing others through our covetous thoughts and actions, let us instead love one another, just as the Apostle Paul exhorts us:

⁹And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart. ¹⁰Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith (Gal. 6:9-10).

B. Prattling Prophets (2:6-11)

Next, Micah turns his attention to a different class of people: the *prattling prophets*. This group is “enablers;” they aid and abet the actions of the robber barons. The Hebrew in this section is difficult to translate in places and makes the interpretation here more difficult.

1. *Provoked Prophets (2:6-7)*

The difficulty in this passage is seen straightaway by comparing the translation of verse 6 in the NKJV and the NIV (which is similar to the ESV):

“Do not prattle,” you say to those who prophesy, so they shall not prophesy to you; they shall not return insult for insult (Mic. 2:6, NKJV).

“Do not prophesy,” their prophets say. “Do not prophesy about these things; disgrace will not overtake us” (Mic. 2:6, NIV).

What is clear from both translations is that there is opposition to the true prophets of God. Likely Micah, Isaiah, and even Hosea are included in this group of true prophets. They are commanded not to “prattle” or to “prophesy.” The word “prophesy” can also be translated as “preach” (thus the ESV), but it literally means “to drip words.” The idea is to influence people slowly, drop by drop as the Word of God is preached or proclaimed. This at all costs must be stopped (in the minds of sinful men), and so the command is given to stop this practice.

Who is giving the command? The NIV attributes it to “their prophets.” That is, to the false prophets who are in league with the robber barons. These *provoked prophets* enable the profiteering of the wicked by preaching of a false gospel – a gospel that does not denounce sin or proclaim judgment on iniquity. The NKJV is less clear – “you say” does not identify the speaker. But from context, it appears as if false prophets are implied, since the true prophets refuse to “return insult for insult” with their accusers.

We know what the content of true prophecy looks like – Micah chapter 1 and the first five verses of chapter 2 are a good example. True prophets call people to repent of their sins and proclaim judgment when there is not repentance. However, this is anathema to the false prophets. They assert that **disgrace will not overtake us** (v. 6, NIV). Micah has just finished saying in verse 3-5 that disgrace would overtake those who sin against God, and the false prophets are trying to revise that message. It doesn’t fit with their worldview! “Please don’t confuse us with the facts,” they seem to be saying. “We don’t want to hear such negative messages.”

The message of the false prophets is based on half-truths. They focus on God’s love, but they completely ignored God’s justice and hatred of sin. Their message is not so different from the

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modern “health, wealth, and prosperity gospel” that some preach today. This false message is further exposed in verse 7:

⁷Should it be said, O house of Jacob: “Is the Spirit of the LORD angry? Does He do such things?” “Do not My words do good to him whose ways are upright?” (Mic. 2:7, NIV).

⁷You who are named the house of Jacob: “Is the Spirit of the LORD restricted? Are these His doings? Do not My words do good to him who walks uprightly?” (Mic. 2:7, NKJV).

I believe that the punctuation (which is not inspired) is better in the NIV than in the NKJV at this point. The NIV punctuates verse 7 as a dialogue – two different speakers making two different points. The first statement talks about the Lord in the third person (“He”). The second statement is the response of God, spoken in the first person (“My”). The NKJV has the entire verse spoken by one party instead of two.

In verse 6, the false prophets have denied the message of the true prophets. They have asserted that disgrace will not come. What is the basis for their claim? They appeal to the character of God. “Does the Spirit of the Lord get angry or impatient? Does He do such things as punish people for sin? No, of course not! God is a God of love. He would never do such terrible things to His people!”

These false prophets are probably basing their theology on Exodus 34:6, where God passes before Moses and proclaims His attributes:

⁶And the LORD passed before him and proclaimed, “The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, ⁷keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin ...” (Ex. 34:6-7a).

So far, so good. God is a patient and gracious God. He does forgive sin and display mercy. But these false prophets apparently forgot the second part of God’s statement about His character:

“... by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children’s children to the third and the fourth generation” (Ex. 34:7b).

This is the part that we all like to gloss over, but this is the part of God’s character that we need to hear over and over again. This is the message of the true prophets, like Micah, Isaiah, and Hosea. This is the gospel message: God punishes sinners, so repent and believe. We want to hear only the good parts, but we must stand with Paul and declare “the whole counsel of God” (Acts 20:27).

God’s response in the second half of verse 7 is ironic. God agrees with the false prophets! He agrees that He does do good to those who are righteous, to those who **walk uprightly**. Up to this point we have no disagreements! The problem is, the gospel teaches that no one can walk uprightly. And so, God invokes the second half of Exodus 34:7 by once again describing in verses 8-10 the sins that lead to the punishment He will visit upon the *profiting profiteers*.

2. *Profiting Profiteers (2:8-10)*

In case we had any doubts, God’s people cannot be considered as those who **walk uprightly**. Instead, God calls them **an enemy** (v. 8). Here, Micah is once again referring to the same group of people he addressed in verses 1-5, the *profiting profiteers* who oppressed others. Boice points out that “they had become God’s enemy by their treatment of other people.”

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To further illustrate the wickedness of these covetous people, Micah gives two examples of their oppression that are consistent with the earlier portrayal in vv. 1-2. The first is in verse 8: **You pull off the robe with the garment from those who trust you, as they pass by, like men returned from war** (v. 8). The exact context of this statement is uncertain, but the overall meaning is clear. They are resorting to violence to take what is not rightfully theirs. The implication is that the rich have hired a rough and ready collection agency to strip away every last asset from their poor debtors. By taking both the robe and the garment, they are in violation of the Law of God:

²⁶ *If you ever take your neighbor's garment as a pledge, you shall return it to him before the sun goes down.* ²⁷For that is his only covering, it is his garment for his skin. What will he sleep in? And it will be that when he cries to Me, I will hear, for I am gracious (Ex. 22:26-27).

Once again, the men of Judah are shown to be no better than the men of Israel, already swept away into captivity because of their sin. Amos decries the same sin in Samaria:

They lie down by every altar *on clothes taken in pledge*, and drink the wine of the condemned in the house of their god (Amos 2:8).

The second example of oppression is in verse 9: **The women of My people you cast out from their pleasant houses; from their children you have taken away My glory forever** (v. 9). Women, probably widows, and their fatherless children are forcibly evicted from their homes to further the plans of these heartless men. As a result, these children have been denied the inheritance of their fathers.

Once again, the punishment fits the crime. Because these men have risen up in oppression against their fellow man, they will **arise and depart** from the land. Just as they have evicted widows and orphans from their property, so God will come to oust these wicked men from the land. They will receive no **rest** in their ill-gotten gains. The Land of Canaan was intended to be a resting place for God's people, but these sinful men did not deserve to rest there because they have **defiled** it through their actions. Therefore, God sends Micah to give these men their eviction notice. Truly this is a case of "visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children's children to the third and the fourth generation" (Ex. 34:7b), since the descendants of these profiteers would also feel the consequences of their parents' sin.

3. People's Prattler (2:11)

This section closes with another reminder about the false prophets of Judah who enabled and supported the profiteers in their activities in verse 11:

¹¹If a liar and deceiver comes and says, 'I will prophesy for you plenty of wine and beer,' he would be just the prophet for this people! (Mic. 2:11, NIV).

¹¹If a man should walk in a false spirit and speak a lie, saying, 'I will prophesy to you of wine and drink,' even he would be the prattler of this people (Mic. 2:11, NKJV).

The section starts with the false prophets telling the true ones to stop prophesying. The section ends with a true prophet (Micah) describing the kind of false prophet the people desire. Do the people of Judah want to hear the truth? Do they want to hear about their sin and their need to repent? Do they want to hear about God's holiness and righteousness and their need for a Savior? No! They can't handle the truth! They want someone to guarantee them a good time

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and an easy life. They want to hear about health, wealth, and prosperity. They want to throw a party and forget about God's righteous demands and instead satisfy their sinful urges. They don't want a *powerful prophet* declaring God's word; instead they want the *people's prattler*, telling them what their sinful hearts want to hear.

These *prattling prophets* are the enablers of a sinful society. They soothe pricked consciences by their denial of the sin problem. They downplay God's holiness and make man the center of attention. Rather than denouncing the wicked actions that flow out of covetous hearts, they whitewash them and make them socially acceptable. It has been said that the road to hell is paved with good intentions. If so, then the *prattling prophets* of Micah's day are building that road, leading God's people to destruction. Let us be wary of those in our day who do the same.

C. Regathered Remnant (2:12-13)

The transition from verse 11 to 12 is stark and unexpected. The tone changes from condemnation to reconciliation, from justice to mercy, from punishment to comfort. And yet, why should that surprise us? If we are going to declare the "whole counsel of God" then we need to look at God's salvation as well as His judgment. The focus of this section is on God's *regathered remnant*.

1. *God Gathers (2:12)*

God through Micah has already promised to send Judah into exile for her sin (1:16). The same fate is implied in 2:4 and 2:10 ("arise and depart"). He has lately demonstrated the reality of this threat upon the northern kingdom of Israel, which had recently been destroyed and exiled by Assyria. Yet, in the midst of this word of punishment, God comes to comfort His soon-to-be-scattered people. Although they will be exiled in judgment, they can take comfort that *God* will *gather* them back again.

God uses the imagery of a shepherd to convey this message: **I will put them together like sheep of the fold** (v. 12b). This image of God as Shepherd is a comforting and familiar one in Scripture. It speaks of God's pastoral care of His people:

¹*The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.* ²He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters. ³He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake (Psalm 23:1-3).

Furthermore, these sheep are called **the remnant of Israel**. This term "remnant" is often applied to those who remain faithful to God despite their circumstances and despite the actions of the majority around them. For example:

²⁰And it shall come to pass in that day that the *remnant* of Israel, and such as have escaped of the house of Jacob, will never again depend on him who defeated them, but will depend on the LORD, the Holy One of Israel, in truth. ²¹The *remnant* will return, the *remnant* of Jacob, to the Mighty God. ²²For though your people, O Israel, be as the sand of the sea, a *remnant* of them will return; the destruction decreed shall overflow with righteousness (Is. 10:20-22).

³²And it shall come to pass that whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved. For in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be deliverance, as the LORD has said, among the *remnant* whom the LORD calls (Joel 2:32).

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2. God's Gatherer (2:13)

In verse 13, the imagery changes from a gentle Shepherd caring for His sheep to a Mighty King who leads His people to victory. *God's gatherer* is the one who is both the Good Shepherd and the Heavenly King. The One who does these things is none other than the Messiah, Jesus Christ.

¹¹*I am the good shepherd.* The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep. ... ¹⁴*I am the good shepherd;* and I know My sheep, and am known by My own. ¹⁵As the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep (John 10:11, 14-15).

¹⁴These will make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them, for He is Lord of lords and *King of kings*; and those who are with Him are called, chosen, and faithful ...

¹⁶And He has on His robe and on His thigh a name written: *KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS* (Rev. 17:14; 19:16).

Conclusion

When Sennacherib came calling upon Jerusalem in 701 B.C., it sure appeared as if God were about to call due all His promises regarding punishment for the sins of Judah. But the people of Judah had apparently listened to Micah and repented of their sins, so that God relented for a time in enacting His judgment. Jerusalem was spared for another 115 years. And yet the time finally came during the ministry of the prophet Jeremiah when the exile prophesied by Micah and the other true prophets of God was fulfilled. God was gracious to His people in Micah's day, because they repented. But there comes a day when the cup of iniquity is full and judgment falls.

The bad news is that God hates sin, that we are all sinners, and that sin must be punished. The good news is that God has provided a way for the sinner to be reconciled to Himself. Jesus Christ, the Messiah, the Good Shepherd, the King of Kings, has taken the punishment for His people's sins upon Himself. If we trust in Christ, we are no longer under the condemnation and power of sin. We are part of the remnant. We experience the tender mercies of Christ as our Good Shepherd. We participate in the victory march of the King as He triumphs over His enemies.

Perhaps you are a *prattling prophet*, leading others astray by your words and conduct. Perhaps you are a *profiting profiteer*, looking out only for number one and not caring about the body count you leave in your wake. Regardless, there is still hope for you. In one sense or another, we are all *prodigal people*, and this gospel is for each one of us. Even though we have turned away from God and towards sin, He calls us to return to Him to be part of His *regathered remnant*. Let us confess our sin and return again now.

Next week: Lesson 4 – Judean Justice – Micah 3:1-12

Close in Prayer.