

VIII. *Great God*

22-Jan-06 Micah 7:1-20

Theme: God's mercy in restoring, blessing, shepherding, and forgiving His people when they don't deserve it demonstrates His unsurpassed greatness.

Key Verses: Micah 7:18-19 ¹⁸Who is a God like You, pardoning iniquity and passing over the transgression of the remnant of His heritage? He does not retain His anger forever, because He delights in mercy. ¹⁹He will again have compassion on us, and will subdue our iniquities. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea.

Review

Last week we studied Micah chapter 6. In this chapter, Micah tells us *what's what*. First he tells us *what* God has done for Israel. He has redeemed them, provided for them, and protected them. God's people are called to remember God's gracious acts in their history and live their lives accordingly in righteousness and holiness. A remembrance of what God has done should always create within us a spirit of thankfulness and obedience. Secondly, the people of God ask *what* God wants from them. They appear willing to meet whatever requirements God has, but their questions of quality, quantity, and ultimate sacrifice only expose them as hypocrites who view God as someone to be purchased rather than to be pleased. The third *what* is Micah's response. They have already been shown "what is good." They should not even need to ask the Lord's requirement, it is already known. But Micah gives them a catechism answer that summarizes God's requirement to live humble obedient lives in submission to the Lord and to love their fellow man as themselves:

⁸He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God? (Mic. 6:8).

After introducing this *court case* to us in the first half of chapter 6, Micah goes on to describe the *criminal consequences* of disobedience. The people of Jerusalem and Judah are guilty of many sins. Micah gives some illustrations of sins that break various commandments. The ultimate sin is "walking in the counsels" of the most wicked kings of the northern kingdom, Omri and Ahab, rather than "walking humbly with God." Their entire lifestyle was one of disobedience and rebellion.

As a result, God begins to call down the *covenant curses*, first promised in the time of Moses, that are a consequence of their sinful behavior. The curses are implemented gradually, leading first to frustration but ultimately to shame, desolation, and reproach. This is exactly what Jesus Christ endured for us on the cross – the full wrath of God through the covenant curses. Jesus bore the reproach for His people, so that we could live obedient lives consistent with Micah's exhortation in chapter 6, verse 8.

Introduction

Today is our final study in the book of Micah. The rhetorical question he asks at the end of chapter seven serves to highlight the theme of this chapter: **Who is a God like you?** (v. 18a). This question is a play on Micah's own name, which means "Who is like Yahweh?" In this question, Micah substitutes the personal name of God ("[Y]ah") for the more general name of

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God (“El”). Of course, the answer to the question is obvious: no one is comparable to our *great God*.

Throughout this chapter, Micah gives us concrete examples of God’s greatness. In the first section (vv. 1-7), the *prophet’s profession* is in a God who administers justice mingled with mercy. Because of their sin, the people of God deserve justice, and yet Micah clings to God for His salvation.

The second section of the chapter (vv. 8-20) is Micah’s *salvation song* that demonstrates the mercy of God toward His people, yet mingled with justice for the unbelieving nations. In four stanzas, Micah demonstrates God’s greatness in a variety of ways. God is the one who restores His people, blesses them, shepherds them, and forgives their sins. Of all these acts, the forgiveness of God is the most unexpected and amazing to Micah. God’s mercy in restoring, blessing, shepherding, and forgiving His people when they don’t deserve it demonstrates His unsurpassed greatness.

Exposition

A. Prophet’s Profession (7:1-7)

The first seven verses of Micah 7 are in the form of a “lament song.” Micah the prophet is lamenting the sin of the people around him. This lament falls into three sections. In the first, Micah uses a metaphor of *faithless fruit* as an accusation against the nation. Micah follows that up with the affliction of *ruthless relations* that is both the result of and the punishment for their sin. But like many of the Psalms, Micah does not leave us there. He goes on to model for us what a *faithful follower* looks like, one who trusts God for salvation in spite of circumstance.

1. Faithless Fruit (7:1-4a)

Woe is me! (v. 1a). Micah the prophet looks around and the culture he sees makes him weep. It has not lived up to its potential and calling. As he contemplates the sin and wickedness of his countrymen, Micah envisions himself as a fruit picker in a garden or vineyard: **For I am like those who gather summer fruits, like those who glean vintage grapes** (v. 1b). However, no matter how hard he looks, there is no fruit available to be picked: **There is no cluster to eat of the first-ripe fruit which my soul desires** (v. 1c).

Have you ever looked forward to a treat all day, only to find out when you get home that there is none left? That is something like the disappointment Micah feels. He was eagerly looking for the sweet fruit of God’s people, and yet he couldn’t find any. No wonder he says, **Woe is me!**

Israel is often compared to a vineyard in Scripture (e.g., Ps. 80:8-16; Is. 5:1-7). This same metaphor is extended to the Church of Jesus Christ:

¹I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. ²Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. ... ⁵I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing (John 15:1-2, 5).

The purpose of the vine is to “bear much fruit.” And yet, Micah can’t find any fruit in Old Testament Judah, particularly amongst her leaders. Instead, he sees wickedness, oppression, injustice, and evil:

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²The faithful man has perished from the earth, and there is no one upright among men. They all lie in wait for blood; every man hunts his brother with a net. ³That they may successfully do evil with both hands—the prince asks for gifts, the judge seeks a bribe, and the great man utters his evil desire; so they scheme together (Mic. 7:2-3).

These verses are a summary of the indictments that Micah brought against the leaders of the nation in chapters 2-3. But now, we are seeing Micah's reaction and gaining insight into Micah's heart. Preaching against the sin of God's people was not enjoyable for Micah. It pained him to see them reject God. He longed to see faithful men, but all he can see is *faithless fruit*. In this assessment, Micah is not alone. His contemporary colleague, Isaiah, says much the same thing:

⁷For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are His pleasant plant. He looked for justice, but behold, oppression; for righteousness, but behold, a cry for help (Is. 5:7).

Extending the agricultural metaphor, Micah says that **the best of them is like a brier; the most upright is sharper than a thorn hedge** (v. 4a). Thorns are a symbol of the curse of sin. After the Fall of Adam, God cursed the ground:

¹⁷... *Cursed is the ground* for your sake; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life. ¹⁸*Both thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you*, and you shall eat the herb of the field (Gen. 3:17b-18).

Because thorns are a symbol of the curse of sin, Christ is crowned with thorns as He bears the curse of sin for His people:

¹⁷And they clothed Him with purple; and they twisted *a crown of thorns*, put it on His head ¹⁸and began to salute Him, "Hail, King of the Jews!" (Mk. 15:17-18).

By comparing these leaders to briars and thorns, Micah is saying that they are "thorns in their neighbors' sides, pricking and hurting where they should be helpful and loving" (Bentley). God people are to be shade-giving trees, not harmful briars and thorns. The only purpose of briars and thorns is to obstruct, to frustrate, to cause pain:

⁵⁵But if you do not drive out the inhabitants of the land from before you, then it shall be that those whom you let remain shall be irritants in your eyes and *thorns in your sides*, and they shall harass you in the land where you dwell (Num. 33:55).

⁶I will lay it [the vineyard of Israel] waste; it shall not be pruned or dug, but there shall come up *briars and thorns*. I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain on it (Is. 5:6).

²⁴And there shall no longer be a *pricking brier or a painful thorn* for the house of Israel from among all who are around them, who despise them. Then they shall know that I am the Lord GOD (Ez. 28:24).

Ultimately, the Bible is clear on the fate of those who are briars and thorns. They shall be burned up in the fire of judgment:

⁴Fury is not in Me. Who would set *briars and thorns* against Me in battle? I would go through them, *I would burn them together* (Is. 27:4).

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⁷For the earth which drinks in the rain that often comes upon it, and bears herbs useful for those by whom it is cultivated, receives blessing from God; ⁸but if it bears *thorns and briars*, it is rejected and near to being cursed, whose *end is to be burned* (Heb. 6:7-9).

2. Ruthless Relations (7:4b-6)

Micah looked for a fruitful vineyard, but he only found an overgrown bramble patch, full of thorns and briars. What is their fruit? **Punishment** and **perplexity** (many versions say “confusion”). Micah is the **watchman** of God who pronounces the consequences of sin. The “confusion” described in verse 5-6 is both the natural result of their activities and also a “punishment” decreed by God for faithlessness.

Micah describes the breakdown of the family and of society in terms of *ruthless relations*:

⁵Do not trust in a friend; do not put your confidence in a companion; guard the doors of your mouth from her who lies in your bosom. ⁶For son dishonors father, daughter rises against her mother, daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; a man’s enemies are the men of his own household (Mic. 7:5-6).

Strife and mistrust in the family and society is under the sovereignty of God. Sin has consequences. Look at the life of David. Although a man after God’s own heart and supremely gifted in many areas, the latter part of David’s life is marred by strife within his family because of his personal sin. James Boice points out:

We are experiencing the same kind of decline in our own time as occurred in Micah’s times. Morality, leadership, and family are crumbling. But notice this: it is not just a meaningless decline. It is part of God’s judgment. For God has decreed that whenever a society departs from Him, the effects of that departure will be seen in every aspect of the life of that society. Paul talks about that in Romans 1:18-32, where he says that once men and women give up on God, neither glorifying Him nor giving Him thanks, God also gives them up to various sins and perversions and to depraved minds. God is a moral God; He is faithful in doing this. There is no one like God in such judgments.

Interestingly, Jesus quotes Micah 7:6 when He describes the impact that He has on the world:

³⁴Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword. ³⁵For I have come to ‘*set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law*’; ³⁶and ‘*a man’s enemies will be those of his own household.*’ ³⁷He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. ³⁸And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. ³⁹He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it (Mt. 10:34-39).

However, Jesus here turns the curse of Micah 7:5-6 into a blessing. In Micah, family strife is a consequence of sin; in Matthew, it is a consequence of salvation through Christ. Christ comes to rescue those who are under the curse of sin; He has transferred them from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of heaven (*cp.* Col. 1:13). Therefore, it is natural that there should be strife between children of light and children of darkness. Our prayer should always be that our unsaved loved ones come to salvation through Christ and enjoy the blessings of eternal life that only He can bring.

3. Faithful Follower (7:7)

Despite the sorrow of Micah at the sinful lifestyles of his fellow Israelites, the prophet still maintains a deep and abiding trust in God. Although everyone around him might be faithless, he will remain a *faithful follower*: **Therefore I will look to the LORD; I will wait for the God of my salvation; My God will hear me** (v. 7). Micah's "pessimism does not drive him to despair, but into the arms of the God to whom he was personally related" (Allen).

Micah's quiet faith is demonstrated by his willingness to **look** and to **wait**. Looking to a God who is unseen is not easy. Waiting on a God who does not seem to be present is difficult. And yet, Micah can and will do these things. His life has been characterized by these actions. He is a living example of his catechism in 6:8 – Micah does justly, loves mercy, and he walks humbly with his God. He is in the habit of looking and waiting on God – it is the customary walk of his life. Therefore, he is confident that **My God will hear me**.

Perhaps you have experienced the strife and tension in your own family that Christ has described in Matthew 10:34-39. Perhaps there are unbelievers in your family who are antagonistic to the gospel, whose lifestyles are contrary to a Christian walk. If so, then you can join in with Micah, looking to God and waiting on God patiently to hear your prayers for their salvation.

This is the end of the first section of chapter 7. It is a passage that emphasizes God's justice against sinners, but the *prophet's profession* of faith reminds us that mercy is possible.

B. Salvation Song (7:8-20)

As we move on to the next section, we will see that mercy is not only possible, it is definite. In the face of who Israel is (vv. 1-4), the grace of God displayed to them in vv. 8-20 is even greater than could ever be expected. God's people deserve justice. What will they receive? Abundant mercy. We surely serve a *great God*.

This passage is in the form of a liturgical hymn. It is "liturgical," because the speaker changes throughout the four stanzas. In this respect, it is similar to many Psalms. In addition, the second half of Micah's *salvation song* has many similarities to Moses' song of victory at the Red Sea (*cp.* Ex. 15). Overall, the song praises God for His incomparable greatness in restoring, blessing, shepherding, and forgiving His people.

1. Lord's Light (7:8-10)

In the first stanza of Micah's song, he emphasizes God's mercy through the *restoration* of His people. The speaker appears to be the daughter of Zion (use of feminine plural in the Hebrew), representing the people of God. Notice the corporate confession of sin in verses 8-9: **I fall ... I sit in darkness ... I have sinned against Him**.

Restoration comes through confession. "Confession of sin is the first step on the road back to spiritual recovery. Yet it is the hardest thing for many to do" (Bentley). The daughter of Zion has recognized her condition (at last!) and has confessed her sin. Now she begins to show the same confidence in God that Micah did in verse 7.

God's people have been in darkness because of their sin. However, in their confession, they begin to move out of darkness and into the *Lord's light*: **I will arise ... The LORD will be a light to me ... He will bring me forth to the light ... I will see His righteousness**. The daughter of Zion now can agree with David the Psalmist:

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¹*The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The LORD is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid? (Ps. 27:1).*

Verse 10 reminds us that God's enemies will not rejoice when His people are restored. Prior points out that the word **enemy** in Hebrew is feminine (consistent with the voice of the speaker – the daughter of Zion), indicating that the enemy in view here might be Nineveh, the capital city of Assyria. The enemy is also described as **her ... her ... she** in verse 10. The question the mocking enemy asks, **Where is the LORD your God?** (v. 10a), is consistent with the tone and message of Sennacherib's messenger to King Hezekiah in 701 BC:

³³Has any of the gods of the nations at all delivered its land from the hand of the king of Assyria? ³⁴Where are the gods of Hamath and Arpad? Where are the gods of Sepharvaim and Hena and Ivah? Indeed, have they delivered Samaria from my hand? ³⁵Who among all the gods of the lands have delivered their countries from my hand, that the LORD should deliver Jerusalem from my hand? (2 Kgs. 18:33-35).

Micah indicates the ultimate fate of all of the enemies of God's people who ask such questions. They **will be trampled down like mud in the streets** (v. 10b). That is, they return to the dust of the earth. God promises death and destruction for His enemies, for those who mock Him and His people: "For dust you are, and to dust you shall return" (Gen. 3:19b).

What a comfort Micah gives us in this first stanza. Through confession of sin, there is restoration with God. That restoration cannot be challenged by the sinners around us; it is not dependent on anyone but God and He guarantees it. Our God is a *great God* because He restores His fallen people.

2. *Boundless Boundaries (7:11-13)*

The second stanza goes beyond the first. God not only restores His people, He also promises to *bless* them. God's future promise (**in the day ... in that day ... in that day**) is to rebuild the strength and security of His people. Micah gives three specific promises of God in verses 11-12: 1) the walls will be rebuilt; 2) the boundaries will be extended; and 3) the nations shall be gathered in. While all three of these blessings have some fulfillment in Old Testament Israel, the promised blessings are much greater than merely physical restoration of Old Testament Israel. The entire Church Age is clearly in view.

The first promise is that the **walls are to be rebuilt** (v. 11a). In order for this to happen, the walls of Jerusalem had to be destroyed, which happened about 115 years after the siege of Sennacherib, by the forces of Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. The promise to rebuild the walls was literally fulfilled in the days of Nehemiah, about 140 years after the destruction of Jerusalem. In the Church age, Christ promises to build up His church (*cp.* Mt. 16:18; 1 Pe. 2:5). Ultimately, it is God Himself who is our wall of protection:

⁴... Jerusalem shall be inhabited as towns without walls, because of the multitude of men and livestock in it. ⁵For I,' says the LORD, 'will be a wall of fire all around her, and I will be the glory in her midst (Zech. 2:4b-5).

The second promise is the extension of boundaries: **the boundary shall be extended** (v. 11b, alternate reading in NKJV, consistent with NIV, NASB, ESV translations). Although Israel did recover after the Babylonian exile, her borders never did approach those of the united kingdom of David and Solomon. Clearly, the picture here is of a spiritual expansion of the kingdom. No

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longer would God's people and God's truth be limited to a small geographic area. The boundaries of God's kingdom on earth would be extended throughout the world.

This extension of the kingdom is reinforced by the third promise: **they [literally he] shall come to you from Assyria and the fortified cities, from the fortress to the River, from sea to sea, and mountain to mountain** (v. 12). The subject and verb of this promise is singular; it seems to be referring to individuals out of the nations, rather than entire nations themselves. The first fulfillment of this promise was in the restoration and return of individual Jews out of the nations back to Israel. However, a much wider spiritual fulfillment is clearly envisioned. Waltke writes:

By specific geographical merisms (*i.e.* opposing synecdoches indicating totality) — from Assyria in the northeast to Egypt in the southwest (the limits of Micah's world) — and by general geographical merisms — *from sea to sea* and *from mountain to mountain* — the universalism of the salvation is projected.

The prophet Isaiah also envisions this global expansion, the *boundless boundaries* of God's kingdom:

⁹They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain, for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea (Is. 11:9).

This expansion of the kingdom of God is described in New Testament terms by the writer of the epistle to the Hebrews:

²²But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, ²³to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect, ²⁴to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel (Heb. 12:22-24).

The walls of God's city are built up, not only to protect His people within, but also to keep those under His wrath and judgment out: **Yet the land shall be desolate because of those who dwell in it, and for the fruit of their deeds** (v. 13). Those outside the wall of God's protection will suffer His judgment. God promises that in the New Heavens and Earth, nothing impure will be able to enter His city:

²⁷But there shall by no means enter it anything that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie, but only those who are written in the Lamb's Book of Life (Rev. 21:27).

In this second stanza of his *salvation song*, Micah describes the blessings that will come in the Church Age. God's kingdom comes and grows and expands, just as Daniel's vision of the stone not cut with human hands comes to smash the kingdoms of this world and to fill the whole earth (*cp.* Dan. 2:31-45). People from all nations are added to God's kingdom and are secure and safe within its walls (*cp.* Mic. 4:1-2). "God Himself will protect His own people from all the assaults of their enemies and the Lord Himself will extend the boundaries of His kingdom" (Bentley). Our God is a *great God* because He blesses and protects His people.

3. *Shepherded Saints (7:14-17)*

In the third stanza, God promises to *shepherd* or take care of His people. This stanza is a dialogue. In verse 14, the congregation asks God to **shepherd Your people**. In verse 15, God promises to do so. And in verses 16-17, Micah responds to God's promise.

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This is the fourth time in the book of Micah that the theme of *shepherded saints* has been raised. In 2:12, God promises to regather His remnant like sheep of the fold. This idea is repeated in 4:8, where God promises to shepherd the remnant as His *forever flock*. In 5:4, the *mighty Messiah* stands and feeds His flock in the strength of the Lord. In both of those verses, God initiated the pastoral care of His people. But notice the difference here in verse 14: the people of God themselves are asking God to shepherd them!

Shepherd Your people with Your staff, the flock of Your heritage (v. 14a). It seems as if the people of God are growing in spiritual wisdom and humility. They are requesting God to care for them, because they now know and realize that they cannot do it themselves. It is a sign of spiritual maturity when we ask God for help instead of relying on our own strength. We need to follow the example of the man who possessed by a mute spirit, who cried out to Jesus: “Lord I believe; help my unbelief!” (Mk. 9:24).

This image of a maturing people is reinforced by their description of themselves: **who dwell solitarily in a woodland, in the midst of Carmel; let them feed in Bashan and Gilead, as in days of old** (v. 14b).

“Mount Carmel was a wooded area on the coast which jutted out into the sea” (Bentley). Prior points out that the name “Carmel” means “garden” in Hebrew. Thus, God’s people are saying that they dwell in a mountainous, forested, garden apart from others. What does that description remind you of? It reminds me of the Garden of Eden – the sanctuary of God. The description of dwelling apart is significant – it points out that the people are to be holy, set apart, separate from the other nations. So, they are describing themselves in terms of worship – they see themselves set apart, dwelling in the Lord’s sanctuary. At last, the people of Micah’s day are starting to think and act Biblically.

Bashan and Gilead are in the Transjordan region and proverbial for their rich pasture and lush fertility. These lands were originally conquered by Moses and were distributed to the two-and-a-half tribes east of the Jordan:

⁷And when you came to this place, Sihon king of Heshbon and Og king of Bashan came out against us to battle, and we conquered them. ⁸We took their land and gave it as an inheritance to the Reubenites, to the Gadites, and to half the tribe of Manasseh (Deut. 29:7-8).

The kingdom of David and Solomon included Bashan and Gilead. After Solomon’s death, these areas were included in the northern kingdom of Israel. However, they were lost to the Assyrians early in the ministry of Micah. Therefore, in Micah’s day, the people of God could only longingly look back at the time when they controlled these lands **as in days of old**.

Because of their rich pasturage, Gilead and Bashan become proverbial places of plenty. They become a picture of the prosperity that is ultimately only achieved in the heavenly kingdom:

¹⁸Therefore thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: “Behold, I will punish the king of Babylon and his land, as I have punished the king of Assyria. ¹⁹But I will bring back Israel to his home, and *he shall feed on Carmel and Bashan; his soul shall be satisfied on Mount Ephraim and Gilead* (Jer. 50:18-20).

The reminiscing started by the people of God in verse 14 is picked up by God Himself in verse 15: **As in the days when you came out of the land of Egypt, I will show them wonders**. The Old Testament prophets are always going back to the Exodus to remind Israel what God had

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done for them. Virtually any category of blessing that the God had given Israel could be found in the Exodus. Mentioning the Exodus in the context of the request for shepherding reminds us how God delivered His people from bondage, led them through the wilderness, and provided food and water for them for forty years. Certainly, these “wonders” are strong reminders that God’s shepherding care is adequate for any situation.

Micah picks up the conversation in verses 16-17. He continues on in the Exodus theme by describing the downfall of the nations. Micah echoes the language and theme of Moses’ song of victory at the Red Sea. Notice that Micah picks up from Moses’ song the dismay and fear of the nations at the power and victory of God:

¹⁴The people will hear and be afraid; sorrow will take hold of the inhabitants of Philistia.
¹⁵Then the chiefs of Edom will be dismayed; the mighty men of Moab, trembling will take hold of them; all the inhabitants of Canaan will melt away. ¹⁶Fear and dread will fall on them; by the greatness of Your arm they will be as still as a stone, till Your people pass over, O LORD, till the people pass over whom You have purchased (Ex. 15:14-16).

The *salvation song* continues to grow in power and strength in this third stanza. God’s people are not only restored and blessed, they are safe and sheltered in the shepherding of God’s care. They grow in maturity and holiness as they are cared for under the powerful watch of the Lord. Their salvation is secure as God defeats His enemies. Our God is a *great God* because He cares for and shepherds His people.

4. Forgiveness Forever (7:18-20)

Micah saves his ultimate example of God’s greatness for the fourth and concluding stanza. We serve a *great God* because He provides us *forgiveness forever*. Allen calls the “fourth and last movement of this liturgical symphony ... a choral piece of devotion and doxology.”

¹⁸Who is a God like You, pardoning iniquity and passing over the transgression of the remnant of His heritage? He does not retain His anger forever, because He delights in mercy. ¹⁹He will again have compassion on us, and will subdue our iniquities. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea (Mic. 7:18-19).

In Micah’s crescendo of praise to conclude his prophecy, there are once again echoes of Moses’ song, as well as Moses’ experience with God on Mt. Sinai and a reference to Psalm 103:

¹¹Who is like You, O LORD, among the gods? Who is like You, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders? ¹²You stretched out Your right hand; the earth swallowed them. ¹³You in Your mercy have led forth the people whom You have redeemed; You have guided them in Your strength to Your holy habitation (Ex. 15:11-13).

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, 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. 34:6-7).

⁸The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in mercy. ⁹He will not always strive with us, *nor will He keep His anger forever*. ¹⁰He has not dealt with us according to our sins, nor punished us according to our iniquities. ¹¹For as the heavens

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are high above the earth, *so great is His mercy* toward those who fear Him; ¹²as far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us (Ps. 103:8-12).

What is unique about our God? How is He different than all the other imagined gods of the pagans? Moses would answer that question by focusing on God's great salvation. However, Micah answers the question by focusing on God's great forgiveness. David the Psalmist describes God's forgiveness "as far as east is from west." Micah, using Exodus imagery, compares God's forgiveness to casting them in the depths of the sea, just as God cast the Egyptians into the Red Sea (*cp.* Ex. 15:1, 4-5). In either image, the picture is of complete and final removal.

Ultimately, Moses' answer and Micah's answer arrive at the same conclusion. God separates our sins from us thoroughly, completely, and eternally, guaranteeing our salvation. In fact, it is only because God can forgive our sin (paid for by a substitute – Jesus Christ), that our salvation is possible.

The last verse of Micah's prophecy reminds us that we can trust God and His promises. If God promises *forgiveness forever*, then He will accomplish it. All we have to do is to look back at God's dealings with the patriarchs to see His faithfulness to all generations: **You will give truth to Jacob and mercy to Abraham, which You have sworn to our fathers from days of old** (v. 20). Waltke summarizes:

In sum, His loving fidelity to the fathers constitutes the basis of Israel's hope. As God kept His promise to Abraham in the age of Moses and Joshua by bringing Israel up out of the bondage of Egypt and into their inheritance of Canaan, so also He keeps it in Micah's time by delivering them from the hand of the Assyrian. Above all He kept His promise to Abraham by raising Christ from the dead and by giving him a spiritual seed from all the nations of the earth (*cf.* Rom. 4:17; Gal. 3:6-29). The elect continue to count on this incomparable God in every trial.

Conclusion

Who is a God like Yahweh? There certainly is no other. Micah has demonstrated the greatness of our God throughout His *salvation song*. Our God is a *great God* because He restores His fallen people. Our God is a *great God* because He blesses and protects His people. Our God is a *great God* because He cares for and shepherds His people. And our God is a *great God* because He forgives the sins of His people forever.

This concludes our study in the book of Micah. Next week, we will begin our study of the prophet Haggai.

Next week: Lesson 9 – Who's Who – Haggai 1:1-2

Close in Prayer.