

International Sunday School Lesson
Study Notes
July 26, 2015

Lesson Text: Micah 7:14-20
Lesson Title: God Shows Mercy

Introduction

The prophet Micah lived about 700 years before Christ and preached in Judea during the reign of three kings: Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah (Micah 1:1). His prophecy consists of three messages on judgment, deliverance, and trust. Although Micah called the people to repent and warned them of the coming judgment (Micah 2:1-2; 3:5; 6:11-12), the people failed to respond. They felt secure in their covenant relationship with the Lord and they assumed God would overlook their sins because of who they were.

The people of Israel were going through the externalities of religion, but internally they were far from God. There was dishonesty in their business dealings, impurity in their lives, violence and lying and deceit. Every kind of flagrant sin was committed openly and without shame. They never truly took Micah's message to heart. Therefore, God would visit the people with judgment.

In his final words to the nation, Micah lamented because there were no godly people left in the land. Trying to find a godly person was like looking for summer fruit after the harvest was over (Micah 7:1). Sin and wickedness had reached every level of society. Leadership was corrupt and the common people of the land were unfaithful (Micah 7:2-4). A faithful friend could not be found and the family unit was dissolving before their eyes (Micah 7:5-6). It was not a pleasant sight for the prophet.

Micah never minimized sin or its effects. However, he reached a point where he looked away from the people's sinfulness and focused on the Lord's faithfulness (Micah 7:7). He decided to watch and pray and look to the future when God would grant forgiveness to His people. In light of our current national and spiritual condition, perhaps we should do the same!

This last section of Micah's prophecy, Micah 7:14-20, is a prayer addressed to the Lord by the prophet. His prayer in verse 7, "*Therefore I will look unto the LORD...*" is expanded. Using a combination of shepherd and Savior metaphors, Micah encourages the nation concerning their future. You might say we have some major encouragement from a minor prophet!

God Shows Mercy through His Provision as Shepherd (Micah 7:14-17)

Verse 14

“Feed thy people with thy rod, the flock of thine heritage, which dwell solitarily in the wood, in the midst of Carmel: let them feed in Bashan and Gilead, as in the days of old.”

Is the speaker in this verse Micah or God? Most likely it is Micah speaking to God in prayer requesting that God would again shepherd His flock. God had promised to unite, care, and provide for His flock (Micah 2:12; 5:4). That seems to be what Micah is asking in the words “Feed thy people with thy rod.”

“Feed” means “to tend a flock.” The word is translated “shepherd” 63 times throughout the Bible. The shepherd’s “rod” was used to protect, discipline, and help the sheep (Psalm 23:4; Isaiah 40:11). “The flock of thine heritage, which dwell solitarily” is a reference to Israel being God’s peculiar people, which has been separated from the rest of the world. No one could care for Israel like the Lord.

“In the wood, in the midst of Carmel” conveys that although Israel was separated from the rest of the world, God placed her in a productive and fruitful place. “Carmel” could be the same “Carmel” where Elijah visited (1 Kings 18), or it could be the home of Nabal (1 Samuel 25). Either way, it was a place associated with rich pastures and safe feeding. “Bashan and Gilead” were great grazing lands in the north and across the Jordan River in Canaan. Both places were known for their fruitfulness and safety.

“As in the days of old” is a reference to the days before the people and leaders had sinned. Micah wanted things to be like they were meant to be with God’s people being the sheep of His pasture (Jeremiah 50:19).

Note: The beauty of verse 14 is that Micah not only identified with the people in relation to their sin, he also had a heart for their restoration. He knew judgment was coming but he prayed and longed for the day when God would once again provide for His people. The people never seemed to have this desire. Thank God Micah did!

Verse 15-17

“According to the days of thy coming out of the land of Egypt will I shew unto him marvellous things. The nations shall see and be confounded at all their might: they shall lay their hand upon their mouth, their ears shall be deaf. They shall lick the dust like a serpent, they shall move out of their holes like worms of the earth: they shall be afraid of the LORD our God, and shall fear because of thee.”

In verses 15-17, God is responding to the prayer of Micah. Through Micah, the Lord told the nation a time would come when He would again be known as a

miraculous God who could do “marvellous things.” The word “marvellous” is the Hebrew word *pala*, meaning “great, difficult, or wonderful.” When Israel came “out of the land of Egypt,” God did “marvelous things” (Exodus 3:20; 15:11). While there is no record that God did miraculous things in bringing Israel out of Babylonian captivity, He did bring them home. Furthermore, when the Lord returns to establish His kingdom upon the earth it will be “marvellous.”

“The nations shall see and be confounded at all their might” points to a future day when the “nations” of the world will witness God’s miraculous works on behalf of His people and they will “be confounded” in comparison to their “might.” As powerful as the Chaldean army was during this period and as powerful as nations and armies are today, soon they will one day be laid low by the power of Almighty God (Micah 5:8).

“They shall lay their hand upon their mouth, their ears shall be deaf” means the “nations” of the world will be speechless and refuse to hear about Israel’s victories through the miraculous power of God. These are encouraging words considering the current spiritual condition of the nation. In great humiliation, “they shall lick the dust like a serpent, they shall move out of their holes like worms of the earth” (Isaiah 49:23). Those who lord their political and religious power over God’s people will one day crawl on their bellies like snakes for fear of God and His people. They will come out of their hiding places “like worms of the earth” and “be afraid of the LORD our God, and shall fear because of thee.”

The prophet Isaiah said, “*Thus saith the LORD to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have holden, to subdue nations before him; and I will loose the loins of kings...*” (Isaiah 45:1). Cyrus did not appear on the pages of history until 200 years after Isaiah wrote these words. God raised up Cyrus to deliver the children of Israel from Babylonian captivity and help them return to the Promised Land. To “*loose the loins of kings*” is a reference to stripping them of their power. Powerful men and rulers may strut in pride today but the day is coming when they will once again “be afraid of the LORD our God.” What great hope and encouragement this must have been for Micah and God’s people.

God Shows Mercy through His Pardon as Savior (Micah 7:18-20)

Micah ends his prophecy with praise for God’s mercy. Unlike the prophet Jonah, who was angry because God spared Nineveh (Jonah 4:1-2), Micah rejoiced that God was merciful and Israel had a future hope.

In the first part of verse 18, Micah tells us *who God is*. Then, the remainder of verse 18 and verse 19, tell us *what God will do* because of who He is. These are three of the most beautiful verses in all the word of God.

Verse 18a

“Who is a God like unto thee...”

Micah asks, “Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage?” The word “pardon” speaks of the official release from penalty; forgiveness; or to be set free.” The prophet Nehemiah said, “*He is a God ready to pardon*” (Nehemiah 9:17). Isaiah said, “*He will abundantly pardon*” (Isaiah 55:7).

Micah asked his question, “Who is a God like unto thee” in view of the nation’s sins. He is obviously astonished at the mercy of God upon His people. Micah’s question, “Who is a God like unto thee” deserves an answer. This was not the first time someone had asked this type of question. Micah was only repeating or echoing an age-old truth about God. When that is the case, it is worth our investigating.

First, when Moses was talking to Pharaoh, he said, “...*that thou mayest know that there is none like unto the LORD our God*” (Exodus 8:10). Second, at the Red Sea, Moses said, “*Who is like unto thee, O LORD, among the gods*” (Exodus 15:11). Third, the prophet Isaiah challenged the heathen to produce anything worthy of comparison to the Lord. He said, “*To whom then will ye liken God? or what likeness will ye compare him*” (Isaiah 40:18). Fourth, the psalmist exclaimed, “*Who is like unto the LORD our God, who dwelleth on high, who humbleth himself to behold the things that are in heaven, and in the earth*” (Psalm 113:5-6).

Micah’s point is God is unequalled. Our God is Creator. The gods of the heathen are creatures. Our God is holy and righteous. The gods of the heathen are unholy and unrighteous. There is no God like our God!

Verse 18b-20

“...That pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? he retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy. He will turn again, he will have compassion upon us; he will subdue our iniquities; and thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea. Thou wilt perform the truth to Jacob, and the mercy to Abraham, which thou hast sworn unto our fathers from the days of old.”

After describing *who God is*, Micah describes *what God will do*. He affirms six encouraging and hopeful truths about God:

1) He pardoneth iniquity- The word “pardoneth” denotes continual action on God’s part. Pardoning the guilty and sentencing the criminal is the one

governmental act that requires wisdom. Our Lord continually “pardons” sinners. What a joy it was for the people to know that those who survived the punishment of captivity would receive a “pardon.”

Notice who is doing the pardoning. It is “God.” It is not the President or the Governor. It is God. The One who was offended! That is mercy! Notice what is being pardoned. It is “iniquity.” It is not speeding tickets or small violations of the law. It is sin. Our Lord “pardons iniquity” and “passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage.” That means God chooses not to look upon His children’s sin because they are His “heritage” or His heirs.

Song: Jesus signed my pardon, this I truly know, Took my place at Calvary, now I won’t have to go. All my life I’ll give Him, He gave His for me, When He signed my pardon, there at Calvary!

2) He retaineth not his anger forever (Psalm 103:9)- Although God justly measures out punishment for sin, He does not remain angry. Because of our sin we were deserving of being separated from God forever, but God did not “retain” or hold that over us. That is mercy!

3) He delighteth in mercy- The reason God pardons iniquity and does not retain anger is because “he delighteth in mercy.” It pleases the Lord to be merciful, to show compassion and forgiveness to sinful man. “Mercy” is God’s nature, one of His attributes. To fail to appreciate the “mercy” of God is to leave yourself ignorant of one part of God that encourages your faith and calms your fears. Facing tomorrow is much easier when you realize it pleases God to be “merciful.”

The Apostle Paul said, “*But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us*” (Ephesians 2:4). Man is a depraved sinner. He is completely hopeless and helpless to do anything about his lost condition. He cannot save himself. God comes on the scene and is pleased to give “mercy.”

Song: Mercy, mercy, God’s loving mercy, that saved both you and me...Oh, if we had gotten justice, we’d surely be lost, but we found mercy at the old rugged cross!

4) He has compassion on Israel- Micah said, “He will turn again, he will have compassion upon us.” “Turn again” means God will come back. At the time of this prophecy, Israel was facing punishment and captivity. What joy to know that God would come back and have “compassion” upon His people. “Again” implies that He had previously had “compassion” upon them. Maybe they were thinking God would never love them again.

“Compassion” is the Hebrew word *racham*. It is a word that means “womb.” It speaks of a deep love of one for another that is rooted in a natural bond. It is a

word that means one feel's another's pain so deeply that they are moved to do something about it. Micah wanted Israel to know that God had pity for them in their weakness, misery, and helplessness.

5) He subdues iniquity and sin- The word "subdue" means "to keep under, bring into bondage." Israel was about to be overtaken and placed in bondage in a foreign land. Micah wants them to know when the sins of our past pursue us like a conquering army, God's mercy will overtake that iniquity and sin. This is more than just forgiveness. God's mercy will tread under foot our personal enemies of "iniquities" and "sins." God's mercy will "cast all our sins into the depths of the sea." When we think of the "sea" we think of a place where things never resurface or are ever found (Psalm 103:12). "All" suggests full and eternal pardon of every sin committed.

6) He is true to Jacob and merciful to Abraham- "Jacob" and "Abraham" are mentioned because of God's unconditional covenant with them. What God promised to "Abraham" and "Jacob," He will "perform." God will stay true to the words He promised Jacob and Abraham. He will bring to pass that which He "swore unto our fathers from the days of old."

The promise in this verse will receive its final fulfillment in the conversion and restoration of the Jewish nation in the future. Speaking of the Jewish people, the Apostle Paul said, "*...but as touching the election, they are beloved for the father's sake*" (Romans 11:28). Therefore we have every reason to expect that the mercies promised to their fathers will be made good to them, in God's own time. For the gifts and callings of God are without repentance (Romans 11:29).

Conclusion

Commenting on Micah 7, Charles Spurgeon said, "The prophet begins in a sorrowful strain, and there is much that is said in the chapter, yet there is also much of holy confidence in God." Thank God for Micah who unashamedly denounced the sin of Israel and warned of the judgment to come. Thank God for Micah who decided to pray and magnify the faithfulness of our covenant-keeping God. The Apostle Paul said, "*If we believe not, yet he abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself*" (2 Timothy 2:13).

Amen.