

June 27

Micah 6-7

One of the sins for which Micah says the judgment of God is going to fall upon Israel is the sin of greed and economic oppression. It is mentioned several times in the chapters that we read today and it is a consistent theme throughout the prophetic books of the Old Testament. In chapter 6 we find Micah prosecuting a legal case against the people of Judah. "I'm not going to forget," he says, "your ill gotten treasures and the short ephah which is cursed. Shall I acquit a man with dishonest scales, with a bag of false weights?" Now this is just one of many sins for which the condemnation of God is being pronounced against Judah, but it is important to realize just how much emphasis there is throughout these prophetic books upon social justice and in particular upon fair treatment of the poor. In every society throughout history (and our society is certainly no different in this regard) the economically deprived are always targeted by the unscrupulous as sources for unethical gain. The terms of weights and measures are used here. Merchants have always had the temptation of putting 14 oz. in a bag and saying it is 16 oz. or balancing a 7 oz. weight on the scale and saying it weighs 8 oz. He judged Israel for it. I would not want to be a dishonest merchant or a slum lord and then have to stand before God's judgment seat!!!

The other sins for which God's anger burned against Judah are not surprising either -- and they are equally contemporary because even though I haven't seen an idol lately, our country is overflowing with false religions of both new and old "age" varieties. Can we afford to be complacent about our situation?

Now it is into this context that the key verses in the whole book of Micah are set. They are found in chapter 6. After insisting that God has little interest in the pious religiosity of people who bring their sacrifices to the temple one day and then immediately upon departing go back to their regular business of oppressing the poor and needy; here is what Micah says: "He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God." You see God isn't impressed by extravagant gifts and sacrifices. His favor cannot be earned. Rather, God cares more the way we express our love to people and our faithfulness to himself. Now just so there is no confusion here, let me affirm once again that the Bible never teaches that anyone can earn salvation from God by doing any amount of 'good works', that is not what Micah is saying here. Salvation -- even in the Old Testament was by faith in the provision that God would make for sin. Remember all the way back in Genesis it said that Abraham believed God and God counted it unto him for righteousness. In Romans chapter 4 Paul uses that very text and the life of Abraham to reinforce that crucial truth. **But** the Bible is equally insistent that if you have been the recipient of the wonderful grace of God, it will show in very profound ways in the way you live your life. God hates hypocrisy and if we say that we have a relationship with Him but live our lives in ways that dishonor Him, His verdict is that we are fooling ourselves and storing up wrath. Remember the little New Testament Book of James? "Faith without works is dead?" That is the thrust of it's teaching. Also the Book of I John falls in with exactly the same

theme. If you really love God -- it will show up in your actions and if it doesn't you are lying to God and others and maybe even to yourself!

There are other things about which we could talk here in this part of the Book of Micah, but the three most significant passages seem to be the prophecies of chapter 5; the call to righteous living of chapter 6, and the final verses of chapter 7. Like so many of the prophets of Israel, Micah ends his book on a note of hope. Israel will one day be restored, he promises, and the basis for his confidence in this future day of grace is rooted squarely in his theology -- his understanding of the nature and characteristics of the Almighty. "Who is a God like you who pardons sin and forgives the transgression of the remnant of his inheritance? You do not stay angry forever but delight to show mercy. You will again have compassion on us, you will tread our sins under foot and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea. You will be true to Jacob and show mercy to Abraham as you pledged on oath to our fathers in days long ago" (7:18-20). Do you see what Micah is doing? He is looking at the present situation and he can only see trouble. The sins of his people have brought down the wrath of God's judgment and it looks bad for Judah. But Micah has something to balance that out -- two things really, his understanding of the character of God, and his reliance upon the promises that God has made regarding the future. God doesn't change, His word is eternal, and so Micah has a choice. We will see it again and again and it's a choice that we are also called upon to make with some degree of regularity. We can grumble about the awful state of affairs around us, or we can rejoice in the glorious future that God has set before us. What will it be for you?