

## Failure and Redemption

Micah 5

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Micah has, in the past four weeks, given us enough reasons for despair. He pointed his finger at the people of God, and he put them under the magnifying glass. And what you then see is not a pretty image.

We have seen how the people of God had become idolatrous. They worshipped many gods beside the one true God of Israel. The reformer and theologian John Calvin said, "The human heart is a perpetual idol factory."

But also, the rich oppressed the poor and grabbed their land and their houses. The poor did not have many reasons for thanksgiving, as they were robbed of their livelihood.



We humans are so able to do what is wrong even though we know better. We are always in need of redemption. Even the people of God.

Micah did not only condemn but he also promised redemption. We have seen that Micah speaks of hope: God will act and change the fate of his people.

If you are in need of God's forgiveness and his redemptive action in your life, then Micah gives us hope and reasons to be thankful.

### 1. People in need of salvation

Not everything in the passage that we have read is easy to understand.

It is a bit hard, because it is poetic language. And beside that, it is language of a poet of 2.700 years ago, in a very different cultural context. And thirdly, the Hebrew text that we have of Micah seems here and there to be corrupted accidentally by those who throughout the centuries tried to faithfully copy the text.

Micah begins this chapter with focusing on the humiliation of the people of God, in verse 1. The cities of Judah are besieged, and the enemies who have their armies at the walls of Jerusalem, the Assyrians, strike the ruler of Jerusalem with a rod on the cheek. That is humiliating

Twenty years earlier, a part of God's people, those of the ten northern tribes grouped around their capital in Samaria, they had already been led away in captivity by the same Assyrians.

Jerusalem survived the siege laid by the Assyrians at that time, but eventually they also were subjected to foreign rule for more than 100 years.

And after that century of oppression, Jerusalem rose up against the world powers. That was not wise of them.

The Babylonian King Nebukadnezar II came with his armies to Jerusalem and he razed the city. He took the people of Jerusalem as captives to Babylon.

The people of God had always assumed they would escape this fate. There were enough false prophets who would say what they wanted to hear. 'God loves you, worry not. He will never let anything bad happen to you.'

With that same false sense of security, we could also ignore the mess we humans made of our climate. Of how badly we exploit the land, and animals, just so that we always have enough, today.



And as preacher, it is always safe to preach about the love and the grace and the goodness of God. But that can be dangerous, if it closes our eyes for the mess we make of our lives and of our world.

Micah was not hired by a church council, and he was not employed by the king of Jerusalem, so he could be brave and speak freely.

And he made clear, we have seen this in the past weeks, that how the rich treated the poor was evil. And he spoke with anger about the false religiosity and idolatry of the people.

And he smacked them - with words - for not trusting God, but instead they asked Egypt to save them from the armies of Assyria. As we, humans, often try to solve all our problems by first seeking here and there, and only if nothing works, people then 'try God'.

It was clear. The people of God needed renewal and this would not come except through a time of cutting down. Of doing away. Of real hurtful change.

The way up with God, is the way that goes down first.

That way downward would come for sure for the people of God. God used Babylon for that. But Micah also predicted that eventually a redeemer would come.

## 2. The Redeemer

Micah 5 is often read in the time of Christmas. King Herod asked the Jewish theologians about the place where the expected Saviour - the King of Israel was to be born.

They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet:  
"And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,  
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;  
for from you shall come a ruler  
who will shepherd my people Israel."

So in the time of Jesus, the Jews did not think that Micah 5 had already been fulfilled; they were convinced it was still a future event.

The church has, from the beginning, as we see in the Gospel of Matthew, taken this passage and said: this is about the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ in Bethlehem.

Micah says of Him:

He shall stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the LORD,  
in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God.  
And they shall dwell secure, for now he shall be great  
to the ends of the earth.  
And he shall be their peace.

I will not overload you with verses from the New Testament about Jesus where the same language is used as Micah did here. But it is obvious that the early church believed that Micah's prediction pointed at Jesus Christ.

Micah said that the king of his days in Jerusalem was useless - there was no hope. But he promised: a new king will come, not from corrupt Jerusalem but from the most insignificant place.

From Bethlehem. That is of course where originally the first king, David, and the royal house of Israel came from.

In 586 BC, the Davidic lineage of kings was broken permanently. Since then, Israel no longer had a king. But the promise of God to renew the nation through a king who would be born in Bethlehem, hinted at continuity. God would not let go of his covenant promises to Israel and a new king of David would come to save the nation.

And this new beginning that God will make, Micah said, would have impact far beyond Israel, namely worldwide. The people of God shall dwell secure. No more war, but peace restored.

Because God is God, He is always consistent to Himself. He promised to bless the nation of Israel with His intervention - to help them. That is who He is - always present, always supporting his people.

When we face serious problems, we can always pray to God that He will send us someone to help, and that will always, to some extent, be similar to those occasions in the Old Testament and the New Testament where God came to the aid of his people.

We may feel very insecure these days. Where is this world going to? The air is filled with talk of climate change, economic uncertainties, and pandemic. Or maybe you struggle with feelings of depression. Or guilt.

But our Lord and King makes you live securely. He cares for you and He will act as your saviour. In the light of what Christ did for us, and expecting, eventually, a Great Reset of this world by our Lord himself - you can also today expect him to act in your life. That is very comforting.

### 3. What must people of God do

Now, as Christians we have the good habit of always wondering, what must we now do. What action should we take.

If we notice our shortcomings in the face of God and when we are aware that our lives are not aligned with what He asks of us, what to do?

Let me first stress that Micah had given up on the people of God doing anything. He blamed the people for their idolatry and for their trust in the power of Egypt and for their exploitation of other people and their destruction of the land.

When we read that, it is very healthy for us to draw our own conclusions. We want to love God alone, we desire to serve one another. We do want to take good care of our land, of the earth.

But Micah does not seem to have much hope that God's people will actually change much. He actually focuses more on God who himself will change the nation. As God's mouthpiece, Micah says:

I will cut off your horses from among you  
and will destroy your chariots;  
and I will cut off the cities of your land  
and throw down all your strongholds;  
and I will cut off sorceries from your hand,  
and you shall have no more tellers of fortunes;  
and I will cut off your carved images  
and your pillars from among you,  
and you shall bow down no more  
to the work of your hands;  
and I will root out your Asherah images from among you  
and destroy your cities.



God himself will take action to ensure that his people worship Him alone., that they love one another and that they take good care of the land

He will take action to undo the injustice among his people. And God will make the people trust in Him.

That is actually in line with how Jesus teaches us to pray: 'Your Kingdom come, your will be done...' 'God, please, you do it, we depend on your action. We are too lame.'

As Christians, do we not all experience this dialectic all the time?

You want to love God alone, and be good for all people. But as soon as you try, as soon as you focus on it, you become aware of the major failure that we are.

So you pray for forgiveness, for change, you try again. And surely, you notice again, how you - in spite of your best intentions and prayers - fail again.

And this is a never ending story. The cycle of the Christian life. Sinners who live by grace.

But to people of that sort - to the actual person that you are - God promises salvation. God saw with his own perfect divine eyes that Israel failed miserably to obey him. But to those same people He promised salvation.

I think that as Christians, it is liberating to be brutally honest about ourselves. Yes, that could be devastating and make us deeply depressed, if we would not also be aware of God's love and of his salvation for us.

God loves you as you are. Not as the prefect Christian that you can only dream of becoming. And that you will never be in this life anyway. Sorry if I punch your balloon of unrealistic hope.

Our Lord Jesus Christ is your hope. He is your redeemer. Your shepherd. Your king. Our good behaviour does not carry much weight with God. We thank him for all blessings that He gives, we pray that He continues to sustain us.

## Conclusion

So again, what to do, after having read Micah 5?

First, let us always admit to our Lord God that our life is hopelessly distant from his standard. In spite of our most pious desires and efforts, we stumble again and again.

Let us also thank God that He loves us in spite of ourselves. That He offers forgiveness and redemption and hope for the future.

This does not guarantee a life of ease and leisure. We must not be surprised by problems, by setbacks, by misery, by frustrations.

We saw much of that in Israel's story, but even when Israel went down, it was God acting for them. God may be pruning your life by what happens to you. There is no better sign of his love for you.

He will make all things well, as He showed by sending us his Son Jesus Christ. He is our peace and He will eventually take you into his eternal home.

Amen