

SPIRITUAL CAT SCANS

MICAH

The book of Micah is a series of three sermons. Each message begins with the word “Hear.” Micah 1:2, “Hear, all you peoples! Listen, O earth...” Chapter 3:1, “Hear now, O heads of Jacob, and you rulers of the house of Israel...” And chapter 6:1 begins, “Hear now what the LORD says...”

Micah has a message for God’s people, but are they listening?

Once, a man was driving down the highway when he saw a real-live Indian lying in the road. The Indian had his ear stuck to the pavement.

The man stopped to investigate, and heard him mumble, “Large wheels, wide tires, Ford truck, color green, large dog sitting beside driver, Alabama license plate, traveling at least 80 mph.” The man was astonished...

“You can tell all that by listening with your ear to the ground?” The Indian replied, “Not hardly... that’s the truck that just ran over me.”

Micah had *his ear to the ground* – or better yet - *his ear to the heavens!* He had faithfully listened to God, and was now proclaiming His warnings.

But like the Indian, whether the people listened to Micah or not, it was obvious God’s warnings were real. The

entire region had already been steamrolled by a truck. The Assyrian army was on the warpath.

Assyria began her conquest of the Fertile Crescent in the year 745 BC.

For the next 100 years every king east of the Euphrates River would live in mortal fear of the Assyrians. By 732, much of the land bridge linking Asia and Africa was under Assyria's control. Philistia fell – as did Damascus.

The two Hebrew capitol cities were next – Samaria and Jerusalem.

And God warned His people, “turn from your sin or suffer My judgment.”

The middle of the 8th century BC saw a flurry of prophets – Amos, and Hosea, and Isaiah, and Micah trumpeted God's warnings. For 200 years God tolerated idolatry in Israel, but now His patience had finally expired.

Judgment would come on both kingdoms unless the people repent. The prophets had *heard* from God, but would the people *hear* the prophets?

The book of Micah begins, “The word of the LORD that came to Micah of Moresheth in the days of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, which he saw concerning Samaria and Jerusalem.”

Micah speaks to both Hebrew nations – the northern kingdom of Israel and its capitol in Samaria - as well as, Judah and Jerusalem in the south.

He lays these capitol cities on God's gurney and takes a spiritual Cat Scan – he X-rays their heart to see what lacks in their devotion to God.

Two important points about Micah... First, like Amos he *was all country*.

Micah was from Moresheth – a farming community 25 miles southeast of Jerusalem. He was *a hick from the sticks*, yet God sent him to the big city to confront kings and priests. Micah had an uncommon courage.

And second, the meaning of the name *“Micah”* is also the theme of His message. The Hebrew word translated, *“Micah”* means *“Who is like Yahweh?”* And this is the issue that preoccupies the prophet.

Micah's intention is to elaborate on God's character.

God has no peer! The *fierceness of His wrath* and the *lavishness of His love* are without comparison. *Who is like Him? No one is like our Lord...*

Micah begins with a bang! In verse 3 God descends from heaven, *“For behold, the LORD is coming out of His place; He will come down and tread on the high places of the earth. The mountains will melt under Him, and the valleys will split like wax before the fire, like waters poured down a steep place.”* Here's the first truth you learn about God... *He doesn't always stay in His place.* He's not always sociable, or proper, or mannered...

If you serve an idol you can clear off a space on your shelf or mantle, put the idol on display, and it'll never move. Idols stay in their place.

Or you can keep your idol in the garage, or wear it on your finger, or deposit it in the bank. You can live life around your idol. A good idol knows its place. It doesn't butt in. It stays silent. It never interferes.

But not the true God! He's the ultimate party crasher. God is the guy you keep from your friends since you're not sure what He'll do or say.

If you please Him, *He'll say so*. If you displease Him, *He'll let you know*.

There's one certainty – God won't be ignored. He refuses to be left out. You never know when He'll rock the boat or upset the cart. God could care less about being politically correct. He has no respect for the status quo.

Micah sees the Lord *“coming out of His place.”*

He's not content to hide in heaven and rule from a comfortable distance. God dives in, and gets involved, and intervenes. He is a hands-on God.

This is what Christmas is about... Borrowing from the words of Micah - Christmas is God *“coming out of His place”* - to stand in **our** place.

God left His heavenly throne for the womb of a virgin. John 1:14 puts it *“The Word was made flesh and moved into the neighborhood.”* God saw our pain and plight, so He came *“out of His place”* to be our Savior.

Yet Micah also sees God “*coming out of His place*” to judge our sin. And when He does, nature bows before Him. In verse 3 Micah sees *mountains melt* and *valleys split* and *waters pour* when God comes out of His place.

At His second coming Jesus will return to Earth to punish the wicked.

John saw this future event and wrote, “*Every island fled away, and the mountains were not found.*” When God comes out of His place *anything goes* – the Earth convulses, mountains vanish, the universe buckles.

Who is like our God? No one... God has no rivals or equals.

Verse 5 tells us why God is “*coming out of His place...*” It’s the same reason Jesus will return to Earth in the last days. Micah explains, “*All this is for the transgression of Jacob and for the sins of the house of Israel. What is the transgression of Jacob? Is it not Samaria? And what are the high places of Judah? Are they not Jerusalem?*” God comes to punish sin.

And He intends to judge the capitol cities of both nations. Samaria was a microcosm of Israel, and Jerusalem was Judah in a nutshell.

These capitols had an undue influence on the surrounding villages.

This is how it works today. Certain cities set the trends for the rest of the country. *LA style* and *New York fashion*

set the pace for America's heartland. God judges the cultural centers because of their influence.

Verse 7 notes the sin of Samaria, "Her carved images shall be beaten to pieces, and all her pay as a harlot shall be burned with the fire; all her idols I will lay desolate, for she gathered it from the pay of a harlot..."

Samaria's sin was idolatry – spiritual infidelity. Samaria was an unfaithful lover. She gave her attention and affections to idols.

Verse 9 indicts Jerusalem for the same sins, "For (Israel's) wounds are incurable. For it has come to Judah; it has come to the gate of My people - to Jerusalem." The sin of the north spread south. Israel's Idolatry infected Judah. Because of unfaithfulness, God *came out of His place...*

But in the middle of these two judgments notice Micah's attitude, verse 8. Does he stand by passively? Is there a smirk on his face, as if he thinks they got what they deserve? Is there an "*I told you so*" on Micah's tongue?

The answer is "*Absolutely not!*" Micah cries out in verse 8, "Therefore I will wail and howl, I will go stripped and naked; I will make a wailing like the jackals and a mourning like the ostriches..." Rather than take some perverse joy in God's judgment Micah is anguished and distressed.

In his commentary, Walter Kaiser writes, “Micah is not a dispassionate observer, steeled against the terrors he predicts. Instead, he is so torn apart by the grief that was to come that he wails like a banshee and howls like a jackal as he goes about naked in deep despair.”

In the ancient world when times got *tough* the prophet appeared in the *buff*. Nakedness was a sign of grief. God had revealed to Micah the *bare facts* – the *naked truth* – His people had sinned. Micah was torn.

He walked naked among the people as an expression of his agony.

In essence, Micah was a microcosm of God’s heart - a **Micahcosm**. God is never pleased to punish. It grieves Him deeply. God would rather forgive and bless. God agonizes for His people as Micah mourns.

The rest of chapter 1 predicts God’s judgment on 12 cities. Most of the dirty dozen were within 10 miles of Micah’s hometown, Moresheth.

One detail to note, Micah was a country boy, but he was a talented writer. He was graphic. Micah could spin a phrase. He was a biblical Lewis Grizzard. Here to make his point he uses a few play-on-words.

In verse 10 “**Gath**” means “*announce*.” Micah is saying, “Announce it not, in *announce*.” “**Beth Aphrah**” means “*house of dust*.” He says, “Those who live in the *house of dust* will be rolled in dust.” In verse 11 “**Zaanan**” means “*Go out*.” He’s saying, “The residents of *go out* have to stay in.”

Micah inspired me this week, so I came up with some current examples. If I were Micah, and God called me to warn surrounding cities *I could say...*

A gust of wind will level Augusta... All is not well in Roswell... Beware of sins in Athens... Judgment will head to Buckhead... Lilburn, better turn or burn... Norcross needs the cross... Suwanee will sing its swan song...

Duluth has rejected the truth... Monroe has got to go... Snellville ain't far from Hellsville... And, Stone Mountain has taken God for granite."

You get the point. *Micah uses **puns** to forecast God's **punishment**.*

Who is like our God? He doesn't take sin lying down. He comes out of His place to execute judgment when man's actions need to be punished.

In Chapter 2 the Cat Scan continues - Micah's X-ray turns up more sin...

People steal each other's land... tell God's prophets to shut-up... lack compassion on the poor... landlords kick widows out on the street...

In Micah 2:9, God says, "**The women of My people you cast out of their pleasant houses...**" Nothing is more heartless than to put someone out of their home that doesn't have the means to provide for themselves.

Here's an article from an Austin, Texas newspaper, "**Landlord, John Mattingly, 26, in October served an**

eviction notice on his grandmother, Dorothy Webb, 85, for nonpayment of rent. In court she commented, *‘I guess I’m just not dying fast enough (for him).’* How low can you go?

How can anybody evict their own grandma? It sounds like the greedy landlords in Micah’s day. Since they were so quick to put the poor out on the street, God will evict these nations from the land He promised them.

Eventually, Samaria was sacked by Assyria in 722 BC. Jerusalem was conquered by the Babylonians in 586. God was true to His word.

Yet even though the Hebrew kingdoms fell, verse 12 predicts God will reassemble them in the future. As a shepherd He gathers His lost sheep.

I love the name God gives Himself in 2:13, *“the One who breaks open.”*

Put limits on God – or try to restrict Him – or tell Him what He can or cannot do... *Try to stuff God into a box, and watch Him break it open.*

Perhaps you feel boxed in today – maybe by circumstances, or by foolish choices. Here’s good news *“the One who breaks open”* lives in you. Jesus can shatter chains - set us free - and reassemble our lives.

Micah 3 is a message to the corrupt rulers of Judah and Israel. God’s greatest judgment on a nation can be to turn it over to ungodly leaders...

Verse 2 addresses folks “who hate good and love evil...” The rulers of Micah’s day abused their power, and took advantage of people.

I think it’s important for all of our elected leaders to realize they not only have to answer to their constituents, but ultimately they’re accountable to God. One day they will all have to attend *the big Tea Party* in the sky.

The end of chapter 3 describes the depth of corruption in high places.

Judges and priests were on the take. *In court*, you could buy a verdict. Judges solicited bribes... *In church*, you could pay for the sermon that would tickle your ears. The priests favored the biggest givers.

The leaders of the land had sold out justice and truth for money.

It reminds me of the man who stuffed money in a mattress - \$300,000. Before he died he called his doctor, senator, and pastor to his bedside. He told them, “They say you can’t take it with you, but I’m going to try.”

He handed each man an envelope with \$100,000 cash, and told them, “Just before they close my coffin, toss in the envelope. I trust you guys.”

At the funeral all three men tossed in an envelope, but after the funeral a few confessions were in order. The doctor said, “I needed the money for hospital equipment, so I kept the cash and threw in an empty envelope.”

The senator confessed, “I paid off a few campaign debts. I also threw in an empty envelop.” Finally, the pastor said, “Gentlemen, I’m ashamed of you! I tossed in the whole amount - I wrote him a check for \$100,000.”

Well, verse 12 makes it clear, because of corruption in high places Jerusalem and its Temple will be ploughed under and become ruins.

This prophecy was fulfilled twice in the history of Jerusalem...

In Micah’s three sermons he develops a pattern... He starts the sermon with *a condemnation of sin*, but he ends with *an affirmation of God’s love*.

I’ll never forget spanking Nick one night. As I pulled off my belt, my little guy looks up at me and says, “*Dad, after you spank me will you give me a great big hug.*” Well, that’s what happens in each of Micah’s sermons.

In chapter 3 they get spanked. Now in chapter 4 they get a hug.

Micah looks to the distant future and foresees the Kingdom Age when Jesus reigns in Jerusalem. Verse 1 tells us, “*the LORD’s house shall be established on the top of the mountains... and peoples will flow into it...*”

People will come to Jerusalem – to the Temple - to be taught by Jesus God’s Word and ways... Verse 3 tells us Jesus will judge the nations.

He'll end war and author a peace. He'll beat swords into ploughs - and spears into pruning hooks. At the end of verse 3 He promises, "Nation shall not lift up sword against nation. Neither shall they learn war anymore..."

In that day Jesus will have compassion on the afflicted - the lame - the outcast. The Lord will be a strong tower to the weak and disadvantaged.

This means *today*, we need to reveal His kingdom by caring for people in similar ways.

Micah 4:9-13 compresses thousands of years. It meshes history with prophecy. Judah is compared to a woman in labor. Her pain intensifies. At last, verse 10, "To Babylon you shall go..." It happened in 605 BC.

Yet God also promises to bring Judah back and bless His people. She's told, "The LORD will redeem you from the hand of your enemies." Verse 13 jumps to the end times and speaks of Israel's ultimate victories.

And this is where the prophecy of Micah turns amazing. He's pondering Israel's plight over generations - her ups and downs throughout history.

Hebrew history was like a yo-yo – *up and down – blessed and judged*.

At times it hesitates – like a yo-yo Israel stays down - but then they pop back up. Micah thinks of what it will take to keep them on top forever.

And his mind focuses on the answer – the Savior – an ultimate Ruler.

In 5:2 he predicts, "**But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of you shall come forth to Me the One to be Ruler in Israel, whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting.**" Micah lived 730 years before the birth of Jesus, yet here he foresees the Savior, and predicts His place of His birth.

Remember in Matthew 2:5 when the wise men arrived in Jerusalem they asked the location of where the Messiah would be born. The priests searched and scoured the Scriptures, and found this verse, Micah 5:2.

This is a definitive proof of Jesus' Messianic claims. Seven centuries in advance God pinpointed the exact coordinates to Messiah's birthplace.

"Bethlehem, Ephrathah" was the equivalent of **"Atlanta, Georgia."** *Bethlehem* was the city - *Ephrathah* the larger region or district.

And Micah is amazed that such a small and insignificant city would be chosen by God to host Messiah's birth. Here's why at Christmas we sing, **"O, little town of Bethlehem."** As cities go, it was **"little among thousands."**

Bethlehem was far from the seats of power. God chose humble beginnings for the child who was **"the One to be Ruler in Israel."**

Yet the location of His birth was not the most impressive part of Micah's prophecy. What boggles the mind is that *His birth* was not *His beginning*.

He says of Jesus, “whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting.” The word translated “*everlasting*” means “*from eternity on*.” It speaks of an immeasurable duration. Buzz Lightyear would say, “to infinity and beyond.”

Go back in time as far as your mind will allow... 5000 years - 50,000 years - 500,000 years - 5 billion years - 50 trillion, quintillion years... *and there was Jesus*. Someone translated this term “*everlasting*,” as “*beyond the vanishing point*.” When time fades into eternity there is Jesus.

And the implications here are provocative! This means the *Eternal God* and *Babe of Bethlehem* are one in the same. The *Ancient of Days* became *a child of time*. The *Infinite* became an *Infant*. Jesus is Alpha and Omega - first and last. He has no beginning, and He'll have no end. Jesus is God.

The rest of chapter 5 depicts Jesus as a shepherd to His people. He feeds His flock, and stands in God's strength. Verse 5 speaks of Jesus, “*He shall be great to the end of the earth; and this One shall be peace*.”

In chapter 5 Micah uses the frequent tactic of most OT prophets. He jumps quickly from Messiah's *first coming* to His *second coming*.

In verse 2 He's born in Bethlehem. By verse 6 He defeats the invading Antichrist – or “*the Assyrian*” as Micah calls him - at the end of the age.

Chapter 6 takes us into God's courtroom. And verse 2 trumpets words you never want to hear, “*The Lord has a complaint against His people...*”

After all God did for the Israel, how can they possibly sin against Him?

He brought them out of Egypt. He defeated the king of Moab. They should be looking for a way to say thanks to God – not anger Him.

And Micah asks in verses 6-7 what we should all be asking God. *Lord, how can I please you?* “*With what shall I come before the LORD, and bow myself before the High God?*” *1000 rams? 10,000 rivers of oil?*

God answers in verse 8. “*He 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?*” Here's the shocker – does it take *enormous sacrifices, or elaborate offerings* to please God? *Apparently not...*

Some of you are worried if you've got just the right gifts for the folks on your shopping list this Christmas. The wife and kids can be a pretty picky.

Not so with God... He's not hard to please. It's surprisingly simple. He makes just three requirements... “*do justly, love mercy, walk humbly.*”

“Do justly” – just do the right thing every time – never be satisfied with the excuse, **“that’s just the way it is.”** Treat people fairly - with integrity.

“Love mercy” – don’t wait until people deserve love to give love. Some people withhold their love until it’s earned - they never love. Be gracious.

And **“walk humbly”** – don’t make everything about you. Aren’t you tired of living that way? I know the people around you are. Keep a low profile. Never take the bows for God. Learn to enjoy the shadows.

Here’s how to please God... **do rightly - love freely - walk humbly.**

In chapter 7 Micah looks around and moans his situation. He thinks he’s the only righteous man still alive. He says in verse 2, **“The faithful man has perished from the earth...”** *Ever feel like the last one left who loves God?*

In verse 3, he speaks of people who **“do evil with both hands.”** It’s not enough to sin with one hand. Folks have become two-handed sinners.

Morals are so low, Micah says in verse 5, **“Do not trust in a friend; do not put your confidence in a companion...”** You can’t even trust your own family. No wound *cuts deeper, or hurts more, or stings longer* than those inflicted by a friend or family member. *And let me burst your bubble...*

Live with someone long enough – I don't care if it's Mother Theresa or Billy Graham - eventually he or she will let you down. Even the best among us are still fallible. None of us are ready for the pedestal...

This is why Micah concludes in verse 7, “**Therefore I will look to the LORD; I will wait for the God of my salvation; my God will hear me.**”

Micah had learned to put his confidence in God – not man.

This is what he expresses in verse 8, “**Do not rejoice over me, my enemy; when I fall, I will arise; when I sit in darkness, the LORD will be a light to me.**” When you do stumble and fall don't let an enemy bury you under a mound of guilt – *God gives second chances.*

This is how Micah's prophecy closes. God is “**coming out of His place**” again - but this time to do “**wonders,**” and “**pardon,**” and “**show mercy.**”

As fierce as God is in judgment, He is just as lavish in forgiveness.

Recall Micah's name is his theme - “**Who is like Yahweh?**” He's proven God has no equal. He's noted His sovereignty, His justice, His rightness.

But there is one characteristic that sets God apart. **God has a signature trait.** This is what Micah wants you to remember most about God. *This is the reason I get out of bed everyday... why I love God more and more...*

What sets God apart? His willingness to forgive...

Look at 7:18, “Who 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. He will again have compassion on us, and will subdue our iniquities.”

I love the three phrases in verse 18...

“*Passing over the transgression...*” Your parents keep bringing up your sin over and over. Your spouse won’t let you forget what you did. But God passes over the sin. What’s *under His blood* is *out of His mind*.

“*He does not retain His anger forever...*” Yes, God gets angry at sin. He sees the harm it does us. But His heart is too big to harbor grudges. He is quick to bury the hatchet. Show an inkling of repentance and He’ll forgive.

“*He delights in mercy...*” Extending mercy doesn’t come begrudgingly or reluctantly for God. Mercy isn’t God’s obligation - it’s His delight. Showing mercy is the part of God’s job that gives Him the most pleasure.

And I love verse 19, “You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea.” Not just some sins, but all sins. *Civilized sins and barbaric sins – accidental sins and intentional sins – brazen sins and bashful sins.*

Notice, the Hebrew word translated “all” in verse 19 means... “all.”

And God hurls our sin into the deepest part of the ocean – that’s where no human can *explore* – and where’s there’s no light that can *expose*.

Corrie Ten Boom added to this thought, “God casts all our sin into the depths of the sea, and He posts a “**No Fishing**” sign for good measure.”

Once, Penn State lost a big game because it was penalized for having a 12th man on the field. After the game a reporter pressed Coach Paterno to name *the guilty party who caused the loss*. He replied, “**It’s only a game. I have no intention of ever identifying the boy. He just made a mistake.**”

For us, life is more than “*a game*” – eternity is at stake. Sin is more than “*a mistake*” – it’s often deliberate and malicious. Yet, if you’re in Christ, God treats you the way Coach Paterno dealt with his illegal player.

Here’s what occurred this past week when I sinned... The devil and all hell’s hecklers started calling for my blood. “*Hey God, Sandy sinned. The punishment for sin is death! Make him bleed. Let him die a little at a time.*”

But God answered, “**There’s been enough bleeding - enough dying.**” He then turned to His right hand, and pointed to Jesus. “***We’ve bled enough.***”

“This Sandy, he’s a frail one. He keeps coming back over and over for more mercy - he has no chance without it. But I’ve chosen to forgive him. I’ve put his sin behind us. He’s mine forever – and I’ll make him better.”

And God says that every time I sin... because of my faith in Jesus.

On Jewish New Year orthodox Jews participate in a ritual known as “*Tashlich*” – the term means “**You will cast.**” It’s taken from Micah 7:19.

A man goes to the ocean, or river, or creek. Water flows downstream, so theoretically it all ends up in the ocean. The man empties his pockets of trash and tosses it in the water. He watches the current take it away.

And he’s reminded that God casts all our sin into the deepest sea.

That reminder is a great way for hearts that trust Jesus to end 2009 and start a new year! ***Who is like our God?***
Faithful to judge - quick to forgive!