

“C’mon God! Whaddaya want from me?!”

A Homiletical Exegesis of Micah 6:1-8

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Paragraph breaks in various translations:

NKJV Paragraph break after vv: 2,5,7,8	NIV Paragraph break after vv: 2,5,8	NRSV Paragraph break after vv: 2,5,8	ESV Paragraph break after vv: 2,5,8	PERSONAL Paragraph break after vv: 3,5,8
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My personal translation’s paragraph breaks differed from the other translations in that I chose to include v.3 as part of my first paragraph. The reason I included v.3 with vv.1 and 2 is that I feel v.3 is part of God’s announcement of his case against Israel—His opening statement before the jury, so to speak. God then proceeds in vv.4 and 5 to lay forth His case against Israel by noting His past dealings with them. After pleading with them to remember His devotion to them, God shows His people what He requires of them—their hearts.

Personal Translations of Critical or Difficult Phrases:

הגיד לך אדם מה־טוב ומה־יהנה דורש ממך כי אם־עשות משפט
ואהבת חסד והצנע לכת עם־אלהיך:

NKJV – “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?”

NIV – “He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.”

NRSV – “He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?”

ESV – “He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?”

Personal – “He showed you, man, what is good and what the LORD is requiring from you: surely to act with justice, to love grace, and to walk humbly with your God.”

My translation of this focal point of the text is somewhat different from many of the others. I translated a little more woodenly than the NKJV, NRSV, and ESV because I

want to stay as close to Hebrew syntax as possible in this verse. Chose to translate עֲשׂוּת as “to act with justice” rather than the traditional “to do justice” because I feel that the latter is a bit too abstract. What YHWH is requiring from man is that he carry out justice in a concrete sense. Acting justly was a common theme of the prophets (cf. Amos). I then translated רַחֲמֵי as “grace” rather than “kindness” or “mercy.” My reason for doing so is that רַחֲמֵי implies both kindness and mercy along with other things such as fellowship and hospitality, which are unmerited. The only word that encompasses all of this is “grace.”

Various Commentators’ Views on Micah 6:

I will briefly look at the way in which three different commentators handled this passage, noting their strengths and weaknesses. The commentators I am choosing to engage are Bruce Waltke, Ralph Smith, and John M.P. Smith. I will look at how they treat the passage as a whole, however I will primarily focus on their treatment of v.8.

Waltke sees this passage as YHWH’s charge that Israel has broken the covenant that was established at Sinai. He notes that just as Jacob and Laban, as well as the eastern tribes, erected stone pillars as witnesses to their covenants (Gn. 31, Jos. 22), God summoned “the heavens and earth as a cosmic forum of witnesses to his covenant with Israel.” Now 700 years later, he summons the mountains and the everlasting foundations of the earth to witness the truthfulness of His case against his people. He goes on to state: “...the appeal to these silent witnesses could have carried conviction only if the parties assumed that the treaty had been handed down unchanged from generation to generation.”¹ In dealing with vv.6-7, Waltke imagines that these verses portray the attempted bribery that was perhaps committed by one of Israel’s kings. His primary reasoning for this is that the sacrifices mentioned in this section are of unbelievable extravagance.² Such hypothesizing, while interesting, is not necessary for understanding the main point of this passage which Waltke sees as obedience to the covenant in which “God has shown humankind what is good, a term that summarizes the law’s requirements: to act justly and to love mercy, and to walk humbly (or ‘to walk thoughtfully’ in the light of the covenant’s requirements) with your God.”³ Waltke’s treatment of this passage, while a bit speculative as to the identity of the speaker of vv.6-7, is a very good one—especially given its’ brevity.

Another short treatment of this passage is that of Ralph Smith. Smith’s is a bit more technical than Waltke’s, however this is due to the intended audience of their respective commentaries. Looking at the structure and authorship, Smith begins by noting that the first five verses make up a covenant lawsuit and the last three are an example of Torah liturgy. He views the question answer session as the people’s response to the charges brought against them. Then states that there is no substantial reason for denying this passage to be the work of the prophet Micah.⁴ Moving into the commentary, Smith notes: “This is one of the great passages of the OT. It...epitomizes the message of

¹ Wenham, 830

² *ibid.*

³ *ibid.*, 830-831

⁴ Smith, R., 50

the eighth-century prophets.”⁵ Smith, like Waltke, feels that the mountains and hills are called as witnesses because they have been around long enough to witness God’s dealings with Israel. Smith sees a play on words in vv.3-4 with הִלֵּאתִיךָ (I have not wearied you) and הֵעֵלֵתִיךָ (I have brought you up from Egyptian bondage).⁶ Smith goes on to state again that Israel is the speaker vv.6-7: “She had displeased Yahweh but she claims ignorance. She asks God what he wants.”⁷ After stating that the implied answer to these questions is that none of these things is required, Smith engages the question as to the purpose of sacrifices in the first place: “Is there no need for sacrifice? Yes, there is. What Micah was speaking about, and Isaiah, and Amos, and the Psalmist, was not that sacrifice was wrong, but in and of itself without a proper relationship to God and neighbor, sacrifice is useless.”⁸ Smith’s commentary on this passage, like Waltke’s, is short but excellent. It is not so technical as to be impractical. Especially useful is his tackling of the issue of the necessity of sacrifice in Israel’s worship. This is a subject that Christians today must be prepared to face in-depth as we seek to reach out to our Jewish friends.

Finally, we come to another Smith—John Merlin Powis Smith. Unlike Waltke and R. Smith’s, J. Smith’s treatment of this passage is fairly long. Also unlike Waltke and R. Smith, J. Smith denies Micah’s authorship and applies form criticism and the documentary hypothesis to this passage. Right off the bat, J. Smith chooses to eliminate from v.5 מִלֵּךְ מוֹאָב and בֶּן־בְּעוֹר in order to make the rhythm “smooth and harmonious.”⁹ However, the question that must be asked of J. Smith is “smooth and harmonious to whom?” This is a highly subjective criterion and should not be seen as textual scholarship, but rather opinion. J. Smith also denies Micah’s authorship on the following basis: “...the fact that in chs. 1-3 the religious and political leaders were the objects of denunciation as leading the people astray, while here the people as a whole is reproved, points to different authorship.”¹⁰ (Apparently, multiple authors are required to address two different sets of people in one book). J. Smith then seeks to bolster his case for a different author by stating “the presence of this passage in this context and in the collection of oracles making up chs. 6 and 7 is a sign of late origin.”¹¹ However, J. Smith merely states this and offers no other evidence or reason for coming to this conclusion. That such speculation finds its way into a critical commentary is not surprising and I will not dwell on it any longer. For, despite the above-mentioned weaknesses, J. Smith’s commentary does offer some valuable insight into this passage.¹² Regarding v.8, J. Smith

⁵ *ibid.*

⁶ *ibid.* 51

⁷ *ibid.*

⁸ *ibid.*

⁹ J. Smith, 118

¹⁰ *ibid.*, 119

¹¹ *ibid.*

¹² One major weakness of J. Smith’s commentary is his positing Miriam’s presence in v.4 as a later addition by “some reader, as is clear by its prosaic form.” In support of this, he notes that this is the only mention of Miriam in the prophetic books. (121) However, on the same page, J. Smith makes a surprising (and refreshing) statement about the historicity of Israel’s redemption: “This event lies so deep in the national conscience and is referred to so frequently as the starting-point and basis of the national development, that it is impossible to escape the conviction that it was a historical fact, rather than the product of religious imagination.” J. Smith, 121

feels that it is “the finest summary of the content of practical religion to be found in the OT.”¹³ Noting the extravagance of the gifts mentioned in vv.6-7, J.Smith sees these offerings as “the acme of religious zeal. It is the expression of the religious emotions of men who agonise with longing for the divine blessing, and are willing to yield their hearts’ dearest treasures in order to secure it. The prophet here recognises this fact, and his words, therefore, reflect an unmistakable depth of sympathy and tenderness toward his people. But the practice grows out of a wholly wrong idea of the character of God, and therefore can never be pleasing to him.”¹⁴ J.Smith’s finest observation, however, is his paralleling of this passage with the teachings of Jesus: “[v.8] links ethics with piety, duty toward men with duty toward God, and makes them both coequal factors in religion. In this respect it anticipates the famous saying of Jesus (Mt. 22:34-40), and it marks a wide breach with the popular religion of the prophet’s own times.”¹⁵ J.Smith ends by stating that the main point of this passage is that religion is not a matter of action, but chiefly of character.

Homiletical Outline:

Sermon Title: “*C’mon God! Whaddaya want from me?!*”

Homiletical Keyword: *Requirements*

Interrogative: *What?*

Sermon Outline:

Introduction – Talk about different views of religion and ‘goodness’ in our society and in the church. Talk about our attitudes towards God; our frustrations of trying to be ‘good Christians’ by giving our time, money, etc. Ask the title question, “C’mon God! Whaddaya want from me?!”

- I. Sermon Topic: What does God require of His people?
- II. Requirement #1 – Our Attention (vv. 1-3) God wants us to stop and think about who He is and who we are. He wants us to think about our behavior and attitudes towards him.
 - a. His announcement – God definitely gets the people’s attention! Nature itself is called to witness this trial.
 - b. His charge – Has God burdened His people? How has He burdened us? Do we ever think of Him as a burden?
 - c. His challenge – Answer Him if we can! God knows that He hasn’t ever been a burden to his people. In fact, He’s been the opposite

¹³ *ibid*, 123

¹⁴ *ibid*, 126

¹⁵ *ibid*.

- III. Requirement #2 – Our Remembrance (vv. 4-5) God wants us to recall how He has dealt lovingly with us and rescued and protected us in the past. This should give us a clear picture of His righteousness and His devotion to us.
- a. His deliverance – (*Briefly* note the Exodus and Balaam stories) God rescued His people from slavery and sent them leaders. He protected them from curses and danger and miraculously led them across the Jordan to the promised land. We should remember our past slavery and the danger from which God rescued us and His bringing us into new life.
 - b. His discipline – (*Briefly* note Num. 25:1-9) God disciplined His people from Shittim to Gilgal Even in God’s discipline we see His love. (Prov. 3:11-12; 5:22-23, 6:23)
 - c. His devotion – Remember these acts in order to know that in spite of God’s overwhelming righteousness, He is passionately devoted to His people
- IV. Requirement #3 – Their Hearts (vv. 6-8) We can’t buy God’s favor, nor can we earn His love through extravagance or material goods. God wants us to be devoted to Him and to seek the best for our neighbors.
- a. His Values – Explain the growing extravagance of the offerings mentioned. (burnt offerings>calves>rivers of oil>firstborn offspring) Contrast that with the narrowing of the spiritual requirements mentioned (Acts of Justice>love of grace>humble spirit), explaining רַחֲמֵי.

Conclusion – We’ve seen how God deals with those whom He has redeemed from bondage. How he has showered them with love and mercy. How He has disciplined them in order to save them from themselves. And how He has brought them into a new life with Him. But that wasn’t enough for Israel; and it is sadly too often not enough for us. In spite of God’s grace towards His people in the OT, they continued to renege on their covenant with Him. They continue to seek their own ways and establish their own gods. Time and again they were disciplined; time and again they turned back to their sinful ways.

Then, about 2,000 years ago, God sent a little baby who would eventually do what Israel was powerless to do—rescue them from themselves. Through this child, God would again lead those covered by the blood of the Lamb out from the slavery of a powerful master. God would lead His people through the water and into new life, protecting them, yet disciplining them when necessary, every step of the way. All God would ask in return is that once again, they would keep their focus on Him and walk in His ways, showing loving kindness, mercy and grace to everyone around them because they themselves had been shown loving kindness, mercy and Grace.

“C’mon God! Whaddaya want from me?!” we ask, “I mean, I tithe, I give to charity, I send my kids to a Christian school, (which by the way I have to work my fingers to the bone to afford!) I come to church every week, I even have a quiet time every morning at 5:30 for crying out loud! What will it take for me to get you off my back!? What do I have to do to be a ‘good’ person?” And all the while, God is saying

the same thing, “Act justly, love grace, and walk humbly with me as your sole focus; I’ll do the rest.”

Will we listen to God’s call to goodness? Will we in this coming year, through the power of His Spirit, act justly towards others, showing them grace while we walk humbly with the God who is passionately devoted to us? This is what God requires of us. This is why He came to earth to redeem us. This is what we were created for and this is the only thing that will ever fulfill us. Let us pray...

[Follow prayer with an invitation to be redeemed from slavery and to meet the God who is devoted to us so that we may walk with Him.]

Works Cited

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