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Old Testament Prophecy

Micah 6:6-8

1. Micah was a prophet from the town of Moresheth. Moresheth was a border town between central Judah and Jerusalem and Philistine land and the Via Maris. The Via Maris being one of the primary trade routes between Egypt and Mesopotamia, the prophet most likely would have been exposed to a variety of cultural influences. In addition, Moresheth was a well-to-do farming town, due to its fertile ground. In fact, Micah was likely a farmer himself, albeit a relatively less well-to-do one. This explains how he may have empathized with those whose “small farms were being swallowed up by wealthy landowners” (Dempster). Familiar with both the land and farming, Micah uses several such imagery, accompanied by shepherd imagery. Wolff believes that Micah was also a “leading elder” of the town, which may partially explain his literacy and concern for the poor. Apart from the book’s opening verse, in which it is indicated that Micah served during the reigns of kings Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, it is difficult to ascertain the exact historical context of the oracles contained within. As Duvall and Hays point out, however, prophetic books are “anthologies” and “collections of shorter units,” which are not necessarily “arranged chronologically” (*Grasping God’s Word*, 401). What can be ascertained, however, is that these oracles take place shortly prior to the fall of both Jerusalem and Samaria, respectively, in response to the people’s failure to obey God’s covenant. In this case, the primary sins of the people appear to be their failure to “act justly...love mercy, and to walk humbly with [their] God.” The word for justly here derives from *mishpat*, which means to. Notice the emphasis on to “act” or “do” justice. Next, God’s people are called to “love” mercy, or *chesed*. True justice is not fulfilled by action alone, While action is integral to and necessary for true justice, it must also be evident in a transformation of the heart. Quoting Wolff, “The practice of justice...apparently has not achieved its goal if it has not accomplished the ‘love of kindness’” (181). Lastly, the people are called to “walk humbly with [their] God.” While there is much debate concerning the original word translated “humbly” here, Smith-Christopher suggests that perhaps the exact meaning is not necessary to understand the basic prompt to “walk with God” by “doing justice and loving mercy.”
2. The difference between the audience and our world is the manner in which we “act justly..love mercy, and walk humbly with [our] God.” Thus, those to whom we show God’s loving-kindness will differ depending on our modern-day context. For instance, in the twenty-first century U.S., those to whom we can demonstrate God’s mercy and

chesed include racial and ethnic minority groups, immigrants, refugees, prisoners, LGBTQ+ folks, and other marginalized groups and individuals.

3. The theological principle is that God desires we treat each other well, especially those marginalized, over and against performing religious rituals.
4. The rest of the biblical canon, including the New Testament affirms this theological principles. In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus states that the entire Law can be summed up into the following two commandments: (1) to “Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind” and (2) to “Love your neighbor as yourself” (22:36-40). In the parable of the Samaritan Neighbor, Jesus explicitly demonstrates that we are called to treat everyone as our neighbor, even those whom we may not be inclined to consider as such.
5. As stated earlier, the application of this theological principle will depend on one’s historical time and place. Examples of the twenty-first century U.S. have been given above.

Jeremiah 7:1-7

1. Jeremiah was the son of Hilkiah, a priest, and served as a prophet under the reigns of kings Josiah, Jehoiakim, and Zedekiah. Shortly prior to the beginning of Jeremiah’s ministry, the nation—priests and people alike—failed to obey the law of the LORD. However, one year before Jeremiah received his call as a prophet, king Josiah began a spiritual reformation movement (2 Chron. 34:3). After Josiah’s death, however, the people returned to their wicked ways and despite Jeremiah’s faithful witness, they failed to return to their covenant with the LORD. Ultimately, the book of Jeremiah ends with Jerusalem falling into the hands of the king of Babylon. It appears evident from the text (v.4) that the people regarded the temple as a “safe house,” of sorts, not only against their enemies but God himself. The people failed to “deal with each other justly,” as indicated by the oppression of “the foreigner, the fatherless...the widow...[and the] shed[ding of] innocent blood” (vv. 5-6). Additionally, they “follow[ed] other gods” (v.6). V. 7 reiterates God’s promise that if the people would obey His covenant, that is to act justly, they will remain in the land. Implicitly, if they do not, they will lose the blessing of the land.
2. We are no longer under the old covenant’s conditions and its promises. Instead, we are under the new covenant and thus enjoy “spiritual” blessings, rather than “material” ones (Duvall and Hays, 370). Furthermore, we do not have a temple as the Israelites did, but rather the presence of God indwells us through the Holy Spirit and faith in Christ.
3. The theological principle is that “disobedience to God is sin and sin brings punishment, if not dealt with properly” (Duvall and Hays, 407).
4. The biblical map confirms this theological principle. However, punishment in the New Testament is different from that of the Old Testament in that again it is spiritual in nature rather than material. That is to say, the punishment of continuous unrepentant sin is a disconnect in our relationship with God. Not only does God hurt in response to our sin,

we too suffer as a result of falling out of communion with Him. The so-called “Promised Land” in the New Testament age, then, is a personal relationship with God.

5. The application for the modern-day believer is to examine ourselves and confess our sins—in thought, word, and deed—so that we might be restored to right relationship with God. After all, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.” (1 John 1:9)

Jeremiah 31:10-14

1. This passage is written by the same author as above and thus possesses the same general historical context, although again it is difficult to ascertain the particular contexts for each unit. As for the literary context, it has been established that the book of Jeremiah in particular has no apparent clear pattern, either chronologically or thematically (Duvall and Hays, 401). The passage in question, however, clearly belongs to the “hope and restoration” theme of the prophet’s message. The aforesaid shepherd imagery is used to describe God as One who will gather His people and “watch over” them (v. 10). V. 12 refers to the place and material blessings promised by the old covenant, that is “the heights of Zion,” “the bounty of the LORD,” “the grain, the new wine, and the olive oil, the young of the flocks and herds.” Again in v. 14 these material blessings are repeated with the words “abundance” and “bounty.” Note the promised restoration is not as a result of the people’s behavior, per se, but rather the LORD’s character; he is the main character of this passage. Indeed, the prophets ultimately provide a picture of “the character of God” and by contrast, our own character, revealing the need for Christ (Duvall and Hays, 415).
2. The difference between the Israelites and ourselves is the material vs spiritual blessings outlined earlier. Our future hope and restoration does not lie in a return to a physical “Promised Land” but into relationship with Himself, beginning in the present through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.
3. The theological principle is God is a God of forgiveness and mercy, longing to bring His people back into relationship with Him, over and against punishing them for their sins.
4. The biblical canon, including the New Testament, affirms this principle. /
5. Possible applications for the modern-day believer include receiving God’s forgiveness and trusting in Christ’s finished work on the cross to atone for our sins. Until we meet the LORD face-to-face, we ought to try our best to live as those freed from the power of sin and death while also acknowledging our moments of weakness and seeking His forgiveness on a continual basis.