

# God’s Special People (Micah)



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## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week’s Study:** *Mic. 1:1–9, 2 Cor. 11:23–27, Mic. 2:1–11, 5:2, 6:1–8, 7:18–20.*

**Memory Text:** “He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?” (*Micah 6:8*).

**Key Thought:** Even amid the worst apostasy, the Lord was willing to forgive and heal His people.

The prophet Micah ministered in one of the darkest periods of Israel’s history. The country long had been divided into two kingdoms. Finally, Assyria put an end to the Northern Kingdom, and Micah could see evil and violence creeping into Judah in the south. He preached against the fatal sins of dishonesty, injustice, bribery, and mistrust. Micah also was the first biblical prophet to predict the destruction of Jerusalem (*Mic. 3:12*).

Yet, through divine inspiration, the prophet saw light in this dark time. With the help of God’s perspective, he looked beyond the coming punishment. Micah offered encouraging words and said that the Lord’s anointed Leader would come from Bethlehem. The Messiah would be the leader who would save Israel and speak peace to the nations by teaching them to “beat their swords into plowshares” (*Mic. 4:3*). God’s rebuke would be the channel of restoration and ultimate blessings.

*\*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, May 18.*

## Agony of the Prophet’s Heart

In Micah 1:1–9, the prophet invites the whole earth to witness God’s judgment against sinful people. The capital cities of Samaria and Jerusalem are singled out because their leaders failed to be role models of what it means to follow God with undivided hearts. These two cities would be the first to suffer destruction.

For Micah, the thought of destructive judgment produced a real tension in his life. Because his prophetic call united him with God’s purpose, he had no choice but to announce what was coming in the near future. But the prophet also loved the people to whom he belonged, and the idea of their captivity drove him to personal lament. Oftentimes bad news had the most devastating effect on the mind and the body of the prophet.

**What do the following texts teach about the hard lot of the prophets?**

*Num. 11:10–15, 1 Kings 19:1–4, Jer. 8:21–9:2, Ezek. 24:15–18, 2 Cor. 11:23–27.*

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God’s prophets were involved very much in the messages that they proclaimed. They did not enjoy speaking about the terrible things that would happen. They often used laments to express their reactions to the coming disasters. Their pain was real. To their listeners, the message was contained both in their prophetic words and also in the external signs, which often betrayed the deep pain stemming from within. Micah’s reaction to divine judgment reminds one of Isaiah, who for three years walked half-naked and barefoot as a visible sign of the shame that captivity would bring. Those of you who have the resources, can read about the great suffering that Ellen G. White endured in her ministry as well; this will help you to better understand what these servants of God had to go through.

**Read 1 Peter 4:14–16 and then look at yourself and whatever trials you are going through. How much suffering has come to you because of your faithfulness to God? How much has come due to your unfaithfulness?**

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## Those Who Devise Iniquity

**Read** Micah 2:1–11 and Micah 3. What are the sins that threaten to bring judgment upon these people?

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“The accession of Ahaz to the throne brought Isaiah and his associates face to face with conditions more appalling than any that had hitherto existed in the realm of Judah. Many who had formerly withstood the seductive influence of idolatrous practices were now being persuaded to take part in the worship of heathen deities. Princes in Israel were proving untrue to their trust; false prophets were arising with messages to lead astray; even some of the priests were teaching for hire. Yet the leaders in apostasy still kept up the forms of divine worship and claimed to be numbered among the people of God.

“The prophet Micah, who bore his testimony during those troublous times, declared that sinners in Zion, while claiming to ‘lean upon the Lord,’ and blasphemously boasting, ‘Is not the Lord among us? none evil can come upon us,’ continued to ‘build up Zion with blood, and Jerusalem with iniquity.’ Micah 3:11, 10.”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 322.

One of the constant problems that the Hebrew nation faced was the deception that their special status as God’s people—their knowledge of the true God, as opposed to the silliness of the pagan idolatry (*see Ps. 115:4–9*)—made them somehow immune to divine retribution. The terrible truth, however, was that it was precisely because they had special status before God that they would be deemed that much more guilty for their sins. Time and again, such as in the book of Deuteronomy, the Lord warned them that all the blessings, protection, and prosperity that would be theirs were dependent upon obedience to His commands, such as seen in this caution: “Only take heed to thyself, and keep thy soul diligently, lest thou forget the things which thine eyes have seen, and lest they depart from thy heart all the days of thy life: but teach them thy sons, and thy sons’ sons” (*Deut. 4:9*).

**However much we might try to fool ourselves, in what ways are we, as Seventh-day Adventists with so much light, in danger of making this same error?**

## A New Ruler From Bethlehem

In Micah’s book the mood often drastically changes from gloom to sublime hope. This hope is seen in one of the most famous of all the Messianic prophecies.

**Read Micah 5:2. Who is being spoken about here, and what does this teach us about Him?** See also *John 1:1–3; 8:58; Col. 1:16, 17.*

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Out of a little Judean town would come Someone from eternity to be a ruler in Israel. Micah 5:2 is one of the most precious biblical verses written in order to strengthen the hope of the people who eagerly awaited the ideal Leader promised by the prophets. His rule would usher a time of strength, justice, and peace (*Mic. 5:4–6*).

David was a native of Bethlehem, a town also called Ephrath (*Gen. 35:19*). The mention of this town stresses the humble origin of both David and His future successor, who would be the True Shepherd of this people (*Mic. 5:4*). In the humble town of Bethlehem, the prophet Samuel anointed Jesse’s youngest son, David, who was to be king over Israel (*1 Sam. 16:1–13, 17:12*). When the wise men came looking for the newly born “king of the Jews,” King Herod asked the Bible experts where to search (*Matt. 2:4–6*). They referred him to this passage, which foretold that the Messiah would come from the small town of Bethlehem.

As incomprehensible as it is to our finite and fallen minds, that baby born was the eternal God, the Creator of the heavens and the earth: “from the days of eternity the Lord Jesus Christ was one with the Father.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 19. However incredible the idea, it is one of the most foundational truths in Christianity: the Creator God took upon Himself humanity and in that humanity offered Himself as a sacrifice for our sins. If you take the time to dwell upon what this teaches us about both the value of our lives and what we as individuals mean to God, you can have a life-changing experience. While so many people struggle to find purpose and meaning to their existence, we have the foundation of the Cross, which not only anchors us in what our lives mean but also gives us the hope of something greater than that which this world ever could offer.

## What Is Good

In the beginning of Micah 6, God dialogues with His people, listing all the things that He has done on their behalf. In response, the worshiper who comes into the temple asks what he might do to please God. What is it that constitutes an acceptable offering: year-old calves, a multitude of rams, rivers of oil, or even the worshiper's firstborn child? There is a steady progression of the size and value of the offerings listed in this text.

**Read** Micah 6:1–8. What crucial truth is being taught here? Why is this especially important for us as Seventh-day Adventists? What does this tell us about how truth is more than just correct doctrine and detailed understanding of prophecy? See *Matt. 23:23*.

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The prophet declares that God already has revealed what He wants. Additionally, through the teachings of Moses, the people know what God has graciously done for them (*Deut. 10:12, 13*). So, Micah's answer is not a new revelation that signals a change in God's requirements. Sacrifices and priestly services are not God's first concern. God's supreme wish is to have a people who act in justice toward their neighbors, and with consistent devotion and love toward the Lord. The most extravagant offering that people can give to God is obedience.

Micah 6:8 is the most succinct statement of God's will for His people. It summarizes all prophetic teachings on true religion: a life displaying justice, mercy, and a close walk with God. Justice is something that people do when prompted by God's Spirit. It has to do with fairness and equality for all, especially the weak and powerless who are exploited by others. Kindness means to freely and willingly show love, loyalty, and faithfulness to others. Walking with God means to put God first and to live in conformity with His will.

**Why is it easier to keep the Sabbath strictly than it is to do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly before God?**

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## Into the Depths of the Sea

Micah’s book begins with a description of judgments, but it ends with words of hope. There are people who try to explain away or deny the reality of God’s judgments. To do so is to fall into the same trap as Micah’s contemporaries who believed that God never would send judgments on the chosen nation.

God’s justice is the other side of His love and concern. The good news presented by Micah is that punishment is never God’s last word. God’s action in Scripture consistently moves from judgment to forgiveness, from punishment to grace, and from suffering to hope.

**Read Micah 7:18–20. How is the gospel revealed in these verses? What hope is seen here for all of us? Why do we need it so desperately?**

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Micah’s closing verses present his praise filled with hope. The question “Who is like God?” matches Micah’s name, which means “Who is like the Lord?” It serves as a reminder of the uniqueness of God and affirms the truth that there is no one like Him. How could there be? After all, He alone is the Creator. Everything else is created. Even more important, our Creator is a God of grace and forgiveness, a God who went to the most unimaginable extremes possible in order to save us from the destruction that is rightly ours. He did it for the Hebrew nation, and He will do it for us as well.

It is possible that we today are surrounded by difficult circumstances and painful experiences that leave us to wonder why God allows all this to happen. Sometimes it is just so hard to make sense of things. In such times, our hope rests only with the Lord, who promises to hurl our sins into the depths of the sea. There is hope for the future in remembering what God has done in the past.

**Take a good, hard look at yourself. Why is your only hope found in the promise that God will cast your sins “into the depths of the sea”?**

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**Further Study:** “If Jerusalem had known what it was her privilege to know, and had heeded the light which Heaven had sent her, she might have stood forth in the pride of prosperity, the queen of kingdoms, free in the strength of her God-given power. There would have been no armed soldiers standing at her gates. . . . The glorious destiny that might have blessed Jerusalem had she accepted her Redeemer rose before the Son of God. He saw that she might through Him have been healed of her grievous malady, liberated from bondage, and established as the mighty metropolis of the earth. From her walls the dove of peace would have gone forth to all nations. She would have been the world’s diadem of glory.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 577.

### Discussion Questions:

- ❶ If you want to understand in a more modern context the suffering that God’s prophets often endured, read from the book *Life Sketches* by Ellen G. White. What does this book teach about the toils and trials that God’s faithful messengers can face?
- ❷ It is so easy to get caught up in religious forms, traditions, and rituals, all of which may be fine. At the same time, though, what happens when these forms and rituals become ends in themselves instead of pointing us toward what it truly means to be a follower of the God whom we worship with those forms?
- ❸ Dwell more on the whole idea of the Incarnation, the idea that the Creator God took upon Himself our human flesh. As one medieval theologian wrote, “Retaining all that He was, Christ took upon Himself what He wasn’t”—and that is our humanity. Think about what this amazing truth reveals about God’s love for us. Why should this truth fill us with hope, gratitude, and praise, regardless of our circumstances?

## *The Lesson in Brief*

► **Key Text:** *Micah 6:8*

► **The Student Will:**

**Know:** Understand that God reveals what is good in His Word. His revelation gives us insights that we cannot otherwise obtain. God wants only our best; therefore, He gives us instructions and laws.

**Feel:** Be attracted to the Lord and His loving character, and enjoy His presence.

**Do:** Spend time with Him and, as a result, His goodness and kindness will be seen in his or her character as he or she acts as He does.

► **Learning Outline:**

### I. Know: Walk Humbly With the Lord

- A** How can you walk humbly with the Lord?
- B** Why is it so difficult to exercise mercy?
- C** What does it mean to do what is right?

### II. Feel: Love Mercy

- A** What is the difference between showing mercy and loving to show mercy?
- B** How does it make you feel to forgive someone who doesn't deserve it?

### III. Do: Act Justly

- A** Why is it so important for God's people to be admonished to do right?
- B** How can you harmonize mercy and justice in your church's decisions while dealing with problematic issues?
- C** Invite class members to share their personal experiences of when they have wrestled over whether to show mercy or justice to an erring person.

► **Summary:** Prophet Micah explains who God is; then he admonishes the people to walk with Him in order to reflect His character, namely by loving to show mercy and to do what is right. Only by beholding God will we emulate and become like Him.



## Learning Cycle

### ► **STEP 1**—Motivate

**Spotlight on Scripture:** *Micah 6:8*

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** God forgives, shows mercy, and acts justly. When we humbly walk with Him, we learn how to love mercy and do what is right. In doing so, we thus reflect His character.

**Just for Teachers:** There is no difference between the God of the Old Testament and the God of the New Testament. This idea is in opposition to Marcion, who already in the second century after Christ made an incorrect distinction between what he characterized as a harsh, just, punishing, and angry God of the Old Testament and the loving, forgiving, and gracious Jesus Christ, the God of the New Testament. The reality is that the God who created humanity and brought Israel out of Egypt and led them to the Promised Land is exactly the same God who died for us on Calvary! “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever” (*Heb. 13:8, NIV*).

**Opening Discussion:** People so often misread the Old Testament and imagine the God of the Old Testament as a God of war, blood, punishment, and judgment, while they overlook the even more severe pictures of a just God in the New Testament (*see, for examples, Matt. 23:13–39, 24:51, Acts 5:1–11, Rev. 14:9–11, 19:17–21*). However, there is only one biblical God who is love (*Exod. 34:6, 7; 1 John 4:16*), so it is our interpretation of Scripture—not the character of God—that is usually distorted and needs to be corrected. Our God, therefore, is the God of love, truth, justice, and freedom.

#### Questions for Discussion:

- 1 In this week’s lesson, what powerful Bible verse gives the most encouragement to the believer in relationship to the battle against evil?
- 2 What is the significance of Christ’s victory on the cross, and what implications does this have for understanding God as the God of love and justice?

### ► **STEP 2**—Explore

**Just for Teachers:** Micah was an eighth-century prophet before Christ (some time between 750–686 B.C.), contemporaneous with Isaiah, and his message is directed to his own generation but especially to the remnant

(this term appears five times in this book—*Mic. 2:12; 4:7; 5:7, 8; 7:18*).

The conditions he gives for the society within which he lives seem like a description he would use if he lived in our postmodern society (see, especially, *Mic. 7:2–6*): there are no godly people; violence and bloodshed prevail everywhere; betrayals reign among friends; the best among the people are like briars; those in power demand bribes; judges are corrupted; conspiracy is everywhere; one cannot trust one's neighbor or one's friend or have confidence in one's spouse; children are in conflict with parents; et cetera. God's message, however, has the power to heal these broken relationships.

## Bible Commentary

### I. What God Requires (*Review Micah 6:8 with your class.*)

The book of Micah is not written for information only; God's Word has power to change its readers. Micah raises very important questions. If God is who He is—loving, forgiving, merciful, compassionate—how can we please our God? How can we gain favor before Him? By sacrificing animals? God does not delight in rituals, or external and formal religion. He wants more. Does this mean giving special gifts? Sacrificing one's own firstborn? Absolutely not. So how should we approach Him? The clear answer is provided in Micah 6:8: "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" (*NIV*).

The New Living Translation puts it in these words: "No, O people, the LORD has told you what is good, and this is what he requires of you: to do what is right, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God."

Micah 6:8 is the verse par excellence for biblical ethics and describes the true Christian lifestyle. In order to better understand what God is saying through Micah, we need to become acquainted with one crucial feature of biblical Hebrew thinking. When biblical authors want to explain a sequence of different actions, they describe them usually from the effect to the cause. This principle works from the visible to the invisible, from the superficial to the real, from the outside to the inside. We think and speak differently today; we explain things from cause to effect.

In other words, to understand what Micah is really saying, to catch his message, we need to reverse his sequence of thoughts. We need to begin to study this verse, starting from the end. Thus, the proper sequence for us today is:

First, "Walk humbly with the Lord!" This is the cause of all other actions described.

Second, "Love mercy!" This is the first result.

Finally, "Act justly!" This is the additional consequence.

**Consider This:** How do we obtain God’s favor? What are the effects of walking humbly with the Lord?

## II. Walk With the Lord! *(Review Genesis 5:24 with your class.)*

In some European countries, when two young people are deeply in love and dating, the people in those cultures describe their relationship with the idiomatic expression “they walk together.” The meaning of this expression is that the couple likes to be together, wishes to know each other, and is in love.

Thus, walking with the Lord means to fall in love with Him, to know more and more who He is, as Enoch walked with God and “was no more, because God took him away” (*Gen. 5:24, NIV*).

In this way, we will become like Him. Whom we love, we copy, and whom we copy makes all the difference. Everything depends on this if we want to be like God, to be as loving, gracious, forgiving, merciful, serving, compassionate, and unselfish as He is.

It is so easy to be spiritually proud, to build on our short-term successful achievements, but to concentrate on them is very deceptive and dangerous. Disappointment is bitter! This is why Micah stresses that we need to walk humbly with the Lord.

**Consider This:** How can you make sure that the everyday routine and worries of life do not distract you from walking with the Lord? How can you walk with the Lord while working, talking, studying, or entertaining?

## III. Love Mercy and Act Justly *(Review Micah 6:8 with your class.)*

It is one thing to show mercy and another to love to show mercy. We need to love to forgive, not to be pushed or forced to do it. We should love unselfishly as our God loves unselfishly. Acting in a self-sacrificing way as God does is possible only by His power. We need to be a living example of God’s remarkable grace. Loving to show mercy brings surprising results.

Only when we walk humbly with the Lord, love to forgive, love to be merciful, and love to show compassion, can we know how to act justly. This is the result of a close walk with the Lord. When we practice love, we can know how to stand for truth and justice and how to have a passion for righteousness.

**Consider This:** What does it mean to “love” mercy? How can we forgive and show mercy to people when they repeatedly make the same mistakes? What does it mean to act justly?

### ►STEP 3—Apply

**Just for Teachers:** God hurls all our iniquities into the depths of the sea. Use the following story to illustrate this concept as you seek to help class members to freely forgive as God forgives us.

**Story: “In the Depths of the Sea”**

One old father was reading Micah 7:19 about God’s putting away of our sins by throwing them into the depths of the ocean. He rejoiced over it and shouted, “Glory to God!” His unbelieving son did not like it, so he brought a scientific encyclopedia for his father to read instead of the Bible. After some time, his son again heard his father shouting, “Glory to God!” The son came and asked his father, “What do you read here that you are so excited about?” The father replied, “I read that scientists, even with the best modern equipment, are sometimes unable to go deep enough to explore all the depths of the ocean. It means that our sins are buried there, and no one can dig them up!” Thanks be to God for this kind of faith that takes God at His Word.

**Thought Questions:**

- 1 How can we not only forgive but also forget what was done to us?
- 2 How can we have the same attitude toward others as God has toward us sinners?

**Activity:** Tell your class members remarkable stories about forgiveness and unselfish love. Discuss with them their various reactions and help them to understand why to forgive is divine.

### ►STEP 4—Create

**Just for Teachers:** Use the story of Christ’s encounter with the woman at the well to explore with your class how, by combining love and justice, we can approach people who have done something terribly wrong. Then answer the questions that follow.

**Activity:** Discuss the ways in which Jesus showed respect to the woman of John 8 despite the fact that she had committed adultery.

**Questions for Discussion:**

- 1 According to this story, what are the first steps in recovering from wrong habits?
- 2 What practical examples can you use to make clear the whole process of forgiveness and reconciliation?