

When God Comes Down

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[0 : 00] The phone rings and it's your extended family, whether it's your adult children, brother, sister, cousin, niece or nephew, and they tell you that they're coming down to visit and stay with you. Now does that fill you with excitement or dread? I guess it depends on the type of relationship you have with your extended family, doesn't it? But either way you need to get ready to meet them, don't you? Whether it's getting the bedding organised, buying extra food, sorting out dietary requirements, picking them up from the airport or whatever. But what if it was God coming down to meet you, to stay with you, to visit you? Would that fill you with excitement or dread? Many of us might want God to come down to sort out this world now, but do you think the people of this world would be ready to meet him? Would you? Today, as I said, we're beginning a new series in the book of Micah, which will point us to Christmas and it begins with a phone call, so to speak, an announcement that God is coming down to visit. But first, let me give you some background. Have a look at verse 1 in your Bibles.

Excuse me, verse 1. The word of the Lord that came to Micah of Moresheth during the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah. The vision he saw concerning Samaria and Jerusalem.

And so here we meet Micah. He lived during the reign of those three kings, as we're just told. And so it's about 735 to 700 BC, around that 30, 35 year period. By this time, the nation's nation of Israel had been split in two. And so there's a map on the screen, but I've also put it on the back of your outlines, because it's a bit hard to see up there. So I didn't check with Glenn the warden to see if I could spend all that money on color photocopying. But anyway, there it is. And as you can see that the kingdom is split in two. In the north is Israel or Jacob.

Both names are interchangeable. And so the names Israel and Jacob can refer to the whole country as it used to be, or just the northern part, the northern kingdom. And the capital of the north is where the blue dot is at Samaria. And then you've got the southern kingdom, which goes by the name of Judah, unless the prophet is talking about the whole country, in which case it'll just say Israel. But Judah is there in the south, and its capital is Jerusalem, where the blue dot, the other blue dot is. This is where Micah lived. In fact, Micah lived just southwest of Jerusalem, where the red dot is. So if you kind of go diagonally left down, you'll find where historians think the town of Moresheth, or Moresheth Gath, as it's called in verse 14, is.

This is the kind of situation Israel, but the situation around the world is that the superpower at the time was not the US or China, it was Assyria, which is what the other map shows you.

[3 : 08] Assyria is in the green, and you can see they've covered Syria, and they're just above Israel, ready to strike, as it were. But the most important part of this background are the first five words of verse 1. Do you see there in verse 1? The word of the Lord.

This is what we meet even before we meet Micah. You see, the word of the Lord is the active agent. Micah is just the conduit. But Micah's name does mean who is like Yahweh, that is, who is like God. And it comes up again, that phrase, at the end of the book, which I've put on the title slide, who is a God like you? And so the book of Micah is kind of bookended by this question, one in Micah's name and one in the verse in chapter 7.

And so the idea is, this book of Micah will reveal what God is like by His word. That's the active agent. And in fact, the book is broken up into three cycles of prophecies, or God's word, which I've put on the screen.

And each cycle begins with the words, hear or listen. Like today, listen, God is coming down to judge idolatry.

[4 : 30] So point one, verse two. Hear you peoples, all of you, listen, earth and all who live in it, that the sovereign Lord may bear witness against you, the Lord from His holy temple.

Listen, the Lord is coming from His dwelling place. He comes down and treads on the heights of the earth. The mountains melt beneath Him and the valleys split apart, like wax before the fire, like rushing water down a slope.

In the courtroom scenes on TV, when the judge walks in the room, the bailiff says, all rise. But when God the judge comes down, all melt, it seems.

There is a judge like no other. This is God. He's a judge like no other person because He is sovereign over all people. Verse two calls Him the sovereign Lord because He rules over all, which is why all peoples and all the earth are to listen to Him.

What's more, it means that all people are accountable to Him, which is why verse two also says that He will bear witness against all people. He is sovereign judge.

[5 : 48] But second, He's also an awesome judge, verse three and four, not just in terms of His sheer size, being able to tread on mountains. I mean, that's a pretty big foot, isn't it, to tread on a mountain.

But in terms of the sheer heat of His holiness, such that the mountains aren't squashed under His weight, but actually melt before Him, we're told.

And the valleys split apart like wax before the fire. Who is like our God, who is sovereign and awesome judge?

And I wonder if this is part of your picture of God, a sovereign judge who melts mountains, or have we reduced Him in our minds?

But if we remember He's a sovereign, awesome judge who melts mountains, doesn't that then make the fact that He's also our heavenly Father even more extraordinary?

[6 : 51] That this great, grand, powerful God enables us to call Him Dad? Doesn't that help us to see how gracious He is towards us?

Who is a God like our God? But while God is judge over all people, it seems He has come down to judge a particular people. In verse 5, he says, All this is because of Jacob's transgression, because of the sins of the people of Israel.

What is Jacob's transgression? Is it not Samaria, the capital? What is Judah's high place? Is it not Jerusalem, its capital? You see, God has come down to judge both Israel and Judah.

What is their sin? Well, we're told it's their capital cities. What does this mean? Well, the capital has often represented the leadership of the country, of the kingdom.

That's where the governments resided. And so how have their leaders caused everyone to sin?

Well, there's a hint at the end of verse 5. Do you notice what Jerusalem is called?

[8 : 02] It's called Judah's high place. A high place in the Old Testament was a place up high, but it's where they put idols and statues and worship other gods.

Idolatry. And with this idolatry that the leaders led the people into came temple prostitution and even sacrificing their own sons and daughters.

It was pure evil. And for 200 years, God patiently sent prophet after prophet after prophet after prophet to warn them and turn them back to him.

And while there were signs of hope in the southern kingdom in Judah, there was not one good king, not one good leader in the north. And so God announces he will send judgment.

He will send Assyria to judge Samaria. See verse 6 and 7? Therefore, God says, I will make Samaria, the capital of the north, a heap of rubble, a place for planting vineyards.

[9 : 10] I will pour her stones into the valley and lay bare her foundations. All her idols will be broken to pieces. All her temple gifts will be burned with fire.

I will destroy all her images or statues. Since she gathered her gifts from the wages of prostitutes, as the wages of prostitutes, they will again be used.

Samaria will be reduced to rubble. The judgment will be devastating, but it will be just. It matches their sin. They sin by worshiping idols, so their idols will be destroyed.

They sin by paying prostitutes to fund temple worship. Well, God's going to take that money they sin with and give it to Assyria, and then they can use it for their prostitutes in temple worship.

Just as they rejected God, so God will reject them. The punishment fits the crime. And we'll see this again later, actually.

[10 : 14] But for the moment, who is a God like ours who takes idolatry this seriously? Does our world? Do we? An idol, of course, doesn't just have to be a statue.

It's anything that holds a higher place than God in our lives. Whether it's a higher place in our hearts or affections, something that we love more than God, like our family or our comfort or our health, or a higher place in our priorities so that we serve it above God, whether that be money or careers, ourselves or sport.

I mean, Australia is well known. I mean, lots of people say that Australia's religion is sport. I'm sure you've heard that before. Our world is very idolatrous. And one day, God will come down to judge with devastating justice, just as he says he'll do to Samaria.

But it will break his heart. See Micah's response in verse 8 and 9? Because of this, I will weep and wail. I will go about barefoot and naked.

I will howl like a jackal and moan like an owl. Why? Well, because Samaria's plague is incurable. It has spread to Judah.

[11:38] It has reached the very gate of my people, even to Jerusalem itself. Here Micah will grieve greatly, barefoot, naked, howling, moaning, because Samaria's plague of idolatry is incurable after 200 years of prophets.

And so their judgment is inevitable. And what's more, it has spread to his own country, right to the gates of Jerusalem. And so Micah then mentions these towns in Judah, verses 10 to 15, those towns which will also cop judgment from Assyria as Assyria marches down, even up to the gates of Jerusalem.

But it will still be a cause of great grief, which is why in verse 16, the last verse of chapter 1, Jerusalem is told to shave her head and go into mourning because her children, her citizens, some of her citizens from Judah in those towns mentioned will go into exile.

And it's why Micah howls and moans. Have you ever heard a jackal howl before? I don't think I had actually, so I looked it up online and this is what it sounds like.

It's a pretty depressing moan, isn't it? Or howl. And this is what Micah is doing. He's in deep anguish, is the point. Micah doesn't avoid the reality of God's just judgment, but he does howl and weep because of it.

[13:14] And I wonder if as God's prophet, he shows us something of God's heart here. That even God, as it were, judge, although he must, will weep because of it.

And what helps me think this is because that's what God, the Son, did when he approached Jerusalem. As Jesus approached Jerusalem and knew the coming judgment, what did he do? He wept. Who is a God like ours who takes idolatry so seriously he cannot let it slide? He will judge it with justice, but through tears, as it were.

But it's not just idolatry, it's also injustice that God will judge. At point two, chapter two, verse one. Woe to those who plan iniquity, to those who plot evil on their beds, and at morning's light they carry it out because it is in their power to do it.

They say power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely. It's certainly true here, isn't it? And normally people plot evil by day and then carry it out at night because it's dark and they can get away with it.

[14:29] But do you notice in verse one, it's the reverse. They plot evil at night on their beds and then carry it out in broad daylight. Why? Well, verse one tells us because it's in their power to do it.

They've got power to perform injustice towards others. And the evil they do is take people's homes, verse two. They covet fields and seize them, houses and take them.

They defraud people of their homes, they rob them of their inheritance. Last year, there was a couple in Queensland called Mark and Maddie who made headlines when their bank missed a settlement deadline and the seller refused to give them another extension and the seller kept the \$75,000 deposit even though it wasn't their fault all because they had the power to do it.

And one article caused the seller greedy. I don't know the full story but amazingly, the bank compensated the couple, gave them not just the \$75,000 deposit back but gave them \$100,000 because it was their mistake.

You're all asking, which bank was that one? I'm changing. It was Westpac actually. They wanted to avoid bad press, hence the power of social media these days.

[15:49] It's pretty impressive, isn't it? But in ancient Judah, there were no such things as social media. And so it seems these powerful could commit injustice in broad daylight.

They could manipulate laws. Swindle people from their homes which verse 2 we're told is to rob them of their inheritance and even their place amongst God's people.

See, when God gave the land to Israel, he gave every family a piece of land for this family and that family, this one and this one so that everyone had some land to live off but also to secure their place amongst God's people.

It kind of reminds me of a couple I heard about who mortgaged themselves silly so that they could buy a property in Turak because by buying a property down there, they would secure their place amongst this elite suburb as it were.

But God gave each family of Israel some land to do that, to secure their place. And so to take their land, to take their fields, was not only to take their livelihood, it was effectively to take their place amongst God's people.

[16:57] and God takes injustice like that seriously. And so he would judge it and again, it will be just. So have a look at verse 3. Verse 3, just as they planned evil on their beds and planned to bring disaster on the poor, so verse 3, God is planning to bring disaster on them.

The punishment fits the crime. Or the rest of verse 3, just as the powerful, or sorry, the poor were powerless against the powerful to save themselves, so these powerful, unjust people will be powerless against God.

Or verse 4, there's a song that is sung to taunt them, but the words of the song are still the words of the powerful who are judged. And the words in inverted commas there, they say they are utterly ruined.

But that's what they did to the poor when they took their homes. They utterly ruined them. As they took possessions of or fields of a family, so their family's possession or field will be taken by God and given to another, to a traitor, to the Assyrians.

End of verse 4. Or verse 5, as they took away the poor's secure place amongst God's people, so God will take away their place amongst the assembly of his people.

[18:14] They will have no family there to receive any lot of land in the future. Perhaps like that greedy Queenslander, if that was the case. They will not be counted amongst God's people to receive their lot or inheritance when they come back into the land or for us in the new creation.

Who is like our God who takes injustice that seriously? Do we? Does our world? Most people only care about injustice if it happens to us.

You know, then we're all up in arms, aren't we? Otherwise, the majority of the world, it's just, there's too much of it to just think about it so we switch off. Or the news doesn't report about it, like what's happening in Iran.

There have been almost 50 days of protests in Iran at the moment and the government's response is to shut down the internet, imprison their people and even kill many of their citizens.

I know this because an Iranian pastor I was speaking to this week told me that his mother is in prison. Or they're in Africa where Christians are continuing to be killed.

[19:24] Even the news about the Ukraine is beginning to wane. But God takes injustice so seriously he will not let it slide forever. He will judge it on the last day with devastating justice though it will break his heart.

Of course, he prefers people to repent. After all, that's why he's waiting to judge our world and why he sent Micah to Jerusalem. But people just don't want to hear the warning, do they?

They prefer to live in denial like these false prophets in verse 6. Do you see there? Verse 6. Do not prophesy, Micah, their prophets say. Do not prophesy about these things of judgment.

Disgrace will surely not overtake us. You descendants of Jacob, should it be said, does the Lord become impatient? Does he do such things? You see what they're saying?

Well, Micah, stop talking rubbish. We don't want to hear this stuff. Judgment won't come upon us. They're living in denial.

[20:26] Or verse 7, you know, they say, should the people of Israel or Jacob say that God loses his patience? Surely God is slow to anger. That's what the Bible in the Old Testament says. Does he really do these things?

Doesn't he do good to his people? And there is truth in that. The only problem is they're no longer acting as God's people. You see, rest of verse 7, here God now speaks, do not my words do good to one whose ways are upright?

But lately, my people have risen up like an enemy. You strip off the rich robe from those who pass by without care like men returning from battle. You drive the women of my people from their pleasant homes.

You take away my blessing from their children forever. Here, it's not just the powerful who commit injustice, but it seems like it's the everyday people of Judah.

They take the robes of those who pass by. That is perhaps price gouging for accommodation so that they've got to sell their robe just to stay. Like those airlines did for the footy finals.

[21 : 30] Did you hear about that? For the footy finals at the end of September, a flight from Sydney to Melbourne was over \$1,000. And then if you wanted to fly on the actual day, it was over \$1,500.

For one return flight. I'm pretty sure it used to be about \$300. Or verse 9, it seems everyone is acting like the powerful, only in verse 9 they're targeting the vulnerable who in those days were widows, driving these women from their homes and so taking God's blessing of inheritance from their children.

Like today, those who scam money from the elderly and the vulnerable and leave them nothing left to live on, nothing left to hand down as an inheritance. In fact, the ACCC said that scams robbed Australians of more than \$2 billion last year alone.

That's horrific, isn't it? God cares about this. He takes injustice seriously, so seriously, he will one day judge our world with devastating justice.

Just as he said he would do to Judah, verse 10. Get up, go away, for this is not your resting place anymore because you have defiled it by their injustice.

[22 : 43] it is ruined beyond all remedy. In other words, I'm going to send you out of this land into exile because of the way you've sinned. This is what's coming.

But instead of repenting, the people do what the prophets did and prefer to live in denial, verse 11. If a liar and deceiver comes and says, I will prophesy for you plenty of wine and beer, that would be just the profit for this people.

He's the ultimate Aussie prophet, isn't it? She'll be right, mate. Plenty of beer and wine for everyone. That's what people want to hear. They don't want to hear that judgment is coming. Instead, when it comes to matters of God and judgment, people actually prefer to be lied to, to hear good times ahead, even if it's not true. So in 722 BC, about 10 years after Micah started his ministry, Assyria did reduce Samaria in the north to rubble.

And some years later, they did travel down through those towns that Micah mentions in chapter 1 as well and came right up to the gates of Jerusalem in 701 BC. But by this time, Hezekiah was king, the last king that we read about in verse 1.

[23 : 57] And he did listen to Micah and he did repent and God did relent. Yet God knew that after Hezekiah would come a king worse than the ones before him.

So 115 years later in 586 BC, He was forced to exile Jerusalem as well. This time using the next superpower, Babylon. But you see, God is still determined to have a people whom He can bless. And so this first prophecy ends with hope. Verse 12. God promises to regather a remnant from the scattering of exile like a shepherd regathering a scattered flock.

A remnant is part of a people, but it says God will regather this remnant from all over Israel, from the north and the south. And it will be massive remnant.

It will throng or heave with people. And it is a certainty. Twice we're told God will surely do this. How?

[25 : 12] Well, Micah explains in verse 13. The one who breaks open the way will go up before them. They will break through the gate and go out. Their king will pass through them. That is the Lord at their head.

God will break open away and the people will burst through the gate of whomever holds them captive, whether it be Assyria or Babylon. And God, their shepherd king, will lead them out from captivity for life amongst his people.

Here is a certain hope from judgment, which of course is ultimately fulfilled in Christ. You see, before God will come down on that last day to judge our world for its idolatry and injustice, he came down in Christ to save it, didn't he?

That's what we remember at Christmas. The word became flesh and dwelt amongst us. And Jesus grew up to be our good shepherd who laid down his life for us at the cross.

To pay for our sins of injustice and idolatry so that we can be freed from captivity to sin, saved from judgment for life eternal amongst his people, regathered remnant.

[26 : 25] And so the way to be ready for when God comes down is not to buy extra food or get the bedding ready or to pick him up from the airport, he doesn't fly in planes. The way to be ready is to believe in Jesus, to trust in him as your king and saviour.

And so are you ready to meet God when he comes down in Christ on that last day? Do you trust in Jesus, the shepherd king? And for us who do, will we share something of God's heart for those who still face judgment?

A guy I knew, whose name was a guy actually, was flying from Queensland to Sydney and he was passing over all these houses and as he looked down he just saw roof after roof after roof and it suddenly struck him about how many people are still lost in this world, still facing judgment. And he didn't go around howling like a jackal or going around naked on the plane, you'd be thankful to know, but his eyes did well up and it moved him to actually become a minister, that was why he became a minister.

For us it might mean making the most of Christmas, praying for opportunities in the lead up and even sharing our hope in Christ if we can. Do we weep? Do we, at least metaphorically, for those still facing judgment?

[27 : 47] And will we pray for God to soften hearts because people still prefer to live in denial, don't they? People prefer lies like, she'll be right mate, it doesn't matter what you believe, we'll all end up in the same place, it'll be fine, all my mates will be there.

Perhaps you know people who are like that or just don't want to hear the gospel, perhaps you have relatives like that, I do. I have actually, I've got one uncle, who I tried to speak to one time and he said he didn't want to talk about it and his words were, she'll be right mate.

But it won't be right unless you trust in Jesus. And so we need to pray that God will soften those hard hearts that live in denial, that they might hear the hope that Christ offers.

And lastly, will we as God's regathered people take idolatry and injustice seriously, unlike Israel? We don't have time to do both, so injustice will come up again later, but think about idolatry.

The antidote to idolatry is to love God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength. And so do we? Or are there things that take his place? Are there things in life that you're tempted to serve above God or to love more than God?

[29 : 04] I think we've all heard about the Andrew Thorburn and Essendon ultimatum, where he has forced to choose between the job of CEO of Essendon or being on the board of his church. But what I only heard last week was that his job at Essendon came with an \$850,000 paycheck.

More than three quarters of a million dollars to be CEO. So if you're Essendon members, that's where all your fees are going, by the way. But hearing that kind of raises the stakes, doesn't it? He's a real choice for him. Be paid more than three quarters of a million dollars in a job you'll love, or serve a church for nothing, for a God you love.

But he put God first, didn't he? He loved God more than money or status. He was a real temptation to fall for idolatry, but he didn't do it.

He took idolatry seriously, didn't he? And so too must we. We've gone over time. Thank you for bearing with me, but hopefully that sets the scene for our next few weeks through Micah.

[30 : 15] Let's pray. Our Father, who is a God like you, who takes idolatry and injustice so seriously that you will judge it justly, even though it will break your heart?

help us, we pray, to mourn for those who are lost, to pray for those in denial, and to live lives that take idolatry and injustice seriously.

Thank you so much for the hope we have in Christ, which has saved us from captivity to sin and judgment to come, for a life eternal amongst your people.

May we never stop thanking you for the hope we have in him. We ask it in his name. Amen.