



**SECOND
SUNDAY**

STUDY GUIDE FOR SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 11, 2018

“What the Lord Requires...” Micah 6:1-8

⁶ Hear what the LORD says: Rise, plead your case before the mountains, and let the hills hear your voice. ² Hear, you mountains, the controversy of the LORD, and you enduring foundations of the earth; for the LORD has a controversy with his people, and he will contend with Israel.

³ “O my people, what have I done to you? In what have I wearied you? Answer me! ⁴ For I brought you up from the land of Egypt, and redeemed you from the house of slavery; and I sent before you Moses, Aaron, and Miriam. ⁵ O my people, remember now what King Balak of Moab devised, what Balaam son of Beor answered him, and what happened from Shittim to Gilgal, that you may know the saving acts of the LORD.”

⁶ “With what shall I come before the LORD, and bow myself before God on high? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? ⁷ Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?” ⁸ 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?

BACKGROUND

PROPHETS IN THE OLD TESTAMENT – Although in modern parlance, a prophet is often considered to be someone who can foresee trends in the future, the O.T. prophets were individuals called by God to guide, challenge and warn God’s people when the people didn’t follow God’s commands. Occasionally, they also gave people hope for the future. Early prophets like Samuel, Elijah and Elisha are known more for their activity, especially advising and occasionally anointing leaders among the Israelites.

The later prophets, whose names are given to books of the Bible, are mainly known for their spoken and written word. There are three “major” prophets – Isaiah, Ezekiel and Jeremiah (given this title because of the length of their books) - and twelve “minor” prophets which includes Micah. The prophets addressed their words to either leaders in the northern Kingdom of Israel/Samaria or the southern Kingdom of Judah (the single kingdom of Israel having split into two kingdoms after King Solomon). Some of them were contemporaries of one another.

MICAH – Micah was a prophet in the southern Kingdom of Judah. His ministry lasted from 737 to 696 B.C.E. Although he was born and lived in a small town, he addressed his prophecies to leaders of the kingdom and of the business and social establishment who were centered in Jerusalem. Micah prophesied at the same time as Jeremiah, Isaiah and Hosea. He was the first of the prophets to predict the fall of Judah which happened in 586 B.C.E., some 150 years after Micah.

A major concern for Micah was the treatment of the poor within the society. For instance, he criticized the elite in Jerusalem for seeking to beautify the city while letting poor citizens languish. He warned of dishonesty and corruption in government and the marketplace, and prophesied that the Lord would let foreigners destroy Jerusalem if the people didn’t change their ways. Also, some in Judah worshipped foreign gods.

THE SETTING – In 722, Assyria captured the Kingdom of Israel and it became a vassal state to that country. Although distinct from Judah, the people of that Kingdom were kin to them, and this came as a great blow. How could the Lord let this happen? Some would say as punishment for Israel’s sin. Judah was also being threatened by the Babylonians, and in 701 B.C.E., Jerusalem was under siege.

In this particular passage, the Lord seems to convene a court to judge the actions of the Kingdom of Judah, how God's people have put money and power and negotiations with foreign powers ahead of a faithful relationship with the Lord. The cause of the widow and the orphan and alien languished. Despite past prophets and the witness of Scripture, the people of Judah have not repented. In a sense, the Lord is asking, "Now what should I do about you?"

In verses 1-2, the Lord sets the scene: all of creation will be the judge against this errant people. In verses 3-5, the Lord reminds the people of Judah of God's great and saving acts: rescue from slavery in Egypt, the appointment of strong leaders, getting them through sticky situations in the wilderness (Balam's refusal to curse the Israelites for Moab's King Balak) and finally guiding them to the Promised Land ("Shittim to Gilgal"). The next voice is that of a defender of Judah asking the Lord, what they could do to make things right with the Lord – offering a series of extravagant sacrifices culminating in that of a firstborn child!

Finally, the prophet speaks, suggesting that the people of God already know the answer, and it doesn't have to do with worship in the Temple: do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God.

SOME QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- *What **surprises** you or is of special interest for you about this passage? What **questions** might you ask about it?*
- *Given what the Lord has done for the people of Israel and their apparent ungrateful response, what kinds of **emotions or motives** might be going on with the Almighty?*
- *Conversely, what might the **leaders of Judah** be feeling? Why do you think they began offering things they could do in a **worship setting**? **In Jesus' day**, Jesus would criticize **another group** in a similar way... for focusing on punctiliously following the Law but neglecting justice and love. Who were they?*
- *The words of the prophet seem to chide the defender of Judah that the Lord has already told them what is "good." How **do you feel** when you see the need to raise a criticism of a practice when you know the individual **already knows** the right thing to do?*
- *The text in Verse 8 speaks of what the Lord "**requires**" (da-rash in Hebrew). Consider alternative words that might have been used such as "asks," "commands" or "demands." How does "require" differ and why do you think it might have been chosen?*
- ***To do justice**... the Hebrew word here is "mishpat." It can also be translated as "judgment" and is almost always used in a legal sense. Does that shed light to you on what it means "to do justice?"*
- ***To love kindness**... The Hebrew word for love, "ahabah," is one that almost always is used in association with human relationships. Kindness is the word "hesed," often translated as "loving kindness" (an O.T. word for "grace"), and most often used to describe God's relationship with humanity. In other translations, we find it given as "mercy," and "goodness." If you could put this Bible guidance **into your own words**, what might it sound like?*
- ***To walk humbly with God**... This is a very graphic portrayal of our relationship with the Lord. What might it mean for disciples **to do this today** in everyday life?*
- *If God were going to consider our congregation, our community, our country, the Christian Church in America, do you think there would be anything **to criticize**? How might this guidance about how to live a "good" life **inform what we do** as individuals and as a people today?*