

- **Sermon: Micah 1. “Who is like God?”**

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Sermon text and audio available for download at www.waitara.anglican.asn.au

- **Book titles**

The title of a book usually tells you what it’s all about. Like these ones: (pictures)

- the ‘teaching your chicken to fly’ handbook; “reusing old graves”; or “Knitting with dog hair”

The books of the Bible are usually named with

- who wrote it – like Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John;
- or who they’re about – like Daniel, Samuel, or Joshua;
- or who they’re written to – like Philippians or Galatians;
- or what they’re about – like Genesis (“beginning”) or Deuteronomy (“second book of law”).
- Micah is the name of the prophet who speaks in this book, but Micah is not just a name, it’s a question. The name Micah means:
 - “Who is like God?”

And that’s the question we’re encouraged to ask as we read Micah. “Who is like God?” The book of Micah tells us what God is like. Is he a loving God? Is he an angry God? Is he forgiving? What is God like? And who is like Him?

So let’s keep that question in mind as we open up Micah and look at chapter 1. “Who is like God?”

Let’s pray first, otherwise Vicki won’t think we’re starting properly. ☺ And I have to write that to test she’s reading it like she said she would...

Verse 1:

- *“The vision he saw concerning Samaria and Jerusalem” **(see map)***

The vision of Micah is about two groups of God’s people: Northern Israel and Southern Israel. Their capital cities are Samaria in the North and Jerusalem in the South.

God gives Micah a vision of His judgement on Northern and Southern Israel. In this vision, God is coming down to bring judgement and punishment on both groups. Verse 3:

- *“Look! The Lord is coming from his dwelling place; he comes down and treads the high places of the earth.”*

Why is he coming down to judge?

God is coming to judge because of the sinfulness of his people. Because of their high places – In the places they were supposed to be worshipping God, they were worshipping idols and other false gods. God warned them for a long time through prophets like Isaiah, and now he’s going to act out his promised judgement because of their disobedience. And what is God going to do? Verse 6:

- ⁶ *“Therefore I will make Samaria a heap of rubble,
a place for planting vineyards...
⁷ All her idols will be broken to pieces;
all her temple gifts will be burned with fire;
I will destroy all her images ...*

God will bring destruction to Samaria\ and all Northern Israel, not only to all their false gods, but to the whole land. God will take it all away. And this actually happens in 732BC, about 10 years after Micah’s prophecy. How does God do this? He stops protecting them and God allows Assyria, the superpower of the day, to come in and destroy Northern Israel and take them into captivity. So God’s judgement is to let Assyria destroy Samaria.

And this should have been a warning for the South, for Judah and for their capital, Jerusalem. But they didn’t listen to the warnings. So when we come to verses 8-16, God is also now going to bring judgement on Jerusalem. But notice in these verses the sadness God expresses:

- ⁸ *Because of this I will weep and wail;
...
⁹ For her wound is incurable;
it has come to Judah.
It has reached the very gate of my people,
even to Jerusalem itself.*

God is in grief that Jerusalem has to face judgement and be punished. God is grieved that they’ve sinned like this and that they have to face punishment.

The situation is like this – imagine a church down the road from us begins to worship money, and encourages everyone to be wealthy because God wants you to be really rich. And the teachers of the church encourage everyone that being rich is the best thing to be. And so people start worshipping wealth. That would be terrible. But then imagine that all the churches around that church see what they’re doing and decide to join in. And we all start worshipping wealth and money.

This is what’s happening in Israel. The sin of Samaria involved two main things: they worshipped false gods, PLUS the rich people were taking advantage of the poor people. And that sin has spread throughout the whole of Israel, even into the holy city of Jerusalem. Because that’s what sin does - it spreads out and takes over. And that’s why God needs to deal with it. Because it’s destroying his people.

And so God, with grief, will now also bring judgement on Jerusalem. This is Micah’s prophecy. First of all, Assyria will come and take over all the surrounding cities of Jerusalem. Verses 10-16. Gath, Beth Ophrah, Shaphir, Zaanan, Maroth, Beth Ezel, Lachish, Aczib... Assyria will take them over, one at a time, and Jerusalem will be left alone.

But Jerusalem **still** won’t listen! They still won’t turn from their sin. And then the Assyrians will lay siege to Jerusalem (that happens in 701BC.) But **even then**, God is kind to them. He still protects them from Assyria. But they still won’t listen.

Until finally, in 597BC, about 100 years later, Jerusalem will eventually be destroyed by the Babylonians.

The vision of Micah is a warning, that God’s people just aren’t listening to.

So what is all this telling us about God? What is God like? Who is like God? Is God a jealous, angry vengeful God who just likes to hurt people? Why doesn’t he forgive? Why does he have to destroy? Why does he take these things so seriously? Why can’t he just let it go?

I think just this opening chapter teaches us two important things about God. The first thing is:

- **1. God hates sin.**

Yes, he is judgemental. Yes, he does bring destruction. Yes, he does get angry. But why? Because he hates sin. And why does he hate sin? Because it destroys his relationship with his people! And God will do anything to restore that relationship with his people – even if it means judgement and some destruction. Like if termites attack your house, you cut them out, along with any wood they've damaged. Why? So they don't destroy the whole house!

In the end, God is a God of love. He punishes to deal with sin, because otherwise, that sin will destroy us, and our community, and our relationship with God.

So that's the first thing. God hates sin. And he will punish and judge BECAUSE of the damage sin does to relationships, and BECAUSE he loves us.

The second thing we learn about God is that...

- **2. God is merciful.**

First of all, God gives his people plenty of warning. It's not like he just walks in and punishes. He gave Jerusalem over 160 years of warning. God is merciful in warning them. And in his mercy, God is very patient with them and gives them plenty of opportunities to turn away from their sin and turn back to him.

But the other amazing thing about God's mercy is that even when they ignore all the warnings, and God has to follow through on his promises to judge and punish, God weeps. God weeps when he has to come to the point of punishing His people. He weeps because he sees their sinfulness and their worship of false idols and he sees what it's doing to their relationship with him. He weeps when they ignore his warnings to turn back to him. He weeps when they ignore his promise to punish. God doesn't ENJOY punishment. He weeps. God doesn't sit there destroying people and laughing at them! God grieves at the consequences of sin.

God hates sin, and brings judgement and punishment to deal with sin... because he loves us.

But God is also merciful. He grieves at our sinfulness and grieves when we don't turn back to him.

So let's ask the Micah question: Who is like God?

And the answer? No-one. No-one hates sin like he does. No-one cares more about their relationship with you than he does. And no-one is merciful like him. And no-one is patient with us like he is. And no-one will weep more than him when sin is attacking our life and our relationship with him.

No-one is like God. No-one loves you like God does. And just to give us a sneak peek at the end of Micah, that's where Jesus and his cross come in. Jesus is the final display of God's love and mercy. God's punishment for our sin put on him. God's wrath for our disobedience poured out on him. Jesus is God's mercy to us – he sent his own Son to suffer our punishment for our sin so we could go free.

Who is like God? Who is that loving? And patient? And merciful? And sacrificial? Who is like God? No-one. No-one.

Let's pray.