

Imagine you lived in Ukraine. Perhaps in one of those cities that are surrounded and being bombarded. Hiding in a cellar, cold, hungry, and increasingly desperate. Imagine you are in Mariupol or Irpin, with the enemy at the door. You're a believer. You trust in God. But all around you, the city is being destroyed and the future – your future, to put it mildly, is grim.

As you face the destruction of all that you know and all that you hold dear, how are you to think? What are we to make of God? As we experience a world under judgement, how are we to react?

Micah could have been written at a time such as today. During his lifetime Micah's homeland was invaded; the cities were destroyed; the land was ravaged by a cruel and merciless people. Micah's name means "Who is like Yahweh?" What sort of a God are you, Lord?

What we are going to see today, as the book comes to its crescendo, is that **God will rescue those who trust him in a world under judgement.**

The first 2 chapters, Micah preaches when everything is fine in his world, and he preaches judgement and destruction, and Micah looks like a lunatic for preaching that. Section 2 comes when they know that Micah was right; Jerusalem was under siege and only a lunatic would say that maybe they are going to survive this. Which is what Micah preaches; and they do.

But now section 3 comes after that narrow escape. The Assyrians nearly destroyed everything; Micah said it was because of their sin, and the people repented – and

God rescued them. An amazing moment. I don't know if you can even imagine that in our national life; the whole nation turns back to God, realises that they are in trouble; and God rescues them from the superpower's army. It would be the most amazing moment to be in the middle of.

But the question is, do narrow escapes lead to improvement? In terms of their addiction to sin, will the Assyrian invasion of 701BC lead to change? Having hit rock bottom, will they realise that they have a problem and seek help? Or will they go back to how they were, and say "well that was a narrow escape...."?

By the time that Micah writes these last 2 chapters, he knows the answer to that question. There has been no change in the people at all.

7v1, he imagines going out of his house looking for some grapes and some figs, but really he is looking for good people. And says v2, "The godly have been swept from the land; not one upright person remains"; v4 "the most upright is worse than a thorn hedge"; so v5 you can't trust your neighbour or your friend; and v6 you can't trust your family. There has been no actual change in their moral behaviour.

But it is not that there has been no change at all. They did notice that there had been an invasion – and it has made them more religious. This is chapter 6 – more religious, but not in the way that God wanted. They think that they have to come before God with great numbers of sacrifices v6&7.

Maybe a thousand sheep – would that be enough? They even think that the religion that is normal in the countries around them – including child sacrifice – would perhaps please God.

God's answer is "no; nothing like that!" What God wants is not sacrifice – he just wanted them to live a decent life. Act justly, love kindness, walk humbly before God – be a decent neighbour. It was nothing terrible that God wanted you to do. Just be a nice person. But we couldn't manage that.

Micah now turns to talk to people who realise that the world is not as it should be – people who realise that judgement will come. Micah had told the people of his day that Babylon is coming; that terrible judgement lies ahead. In just the same way, **we** know that Jesus Christ is coming back and that he will judge us all. Jesus will judge and destroy this world, before he makes the new perfect world that is coming. So how should we live now? As we await judgement.

How should we live? V7 "I watch in hope for the LORD, I wait for God my Saviour". For now you should wait. This is the **first** point: **Wait for the Lord**; however bad things get. And that is the opposite of panic.

Panic might tell us to give up. The world is going wrong; there's nothing I can do – so I might as well give up and join in; become like them.

Or panic might also send us back to our neighbours and to our family, aggressive to tell them how they should live their lives.

Panic might make us become moral lecturers.

Micah will warn people about sin and the way in which it is real, and that rejection of God will be judged; but he doesn't think he's going to make any difference by telling unbelievers to improve their morality. What he does is that he waits for God, confident that He will do what is right. He looks to Him, and he is confident in him however dark things get.

It is clear that we live in a country and in villages that have given up on God. People live for themselves – and do what they want. But there is no need to panic; no need to join in with everyone else; no need to lecture everyone else. No just keep calm and trust God. **Wait for the Lord.** Have confidence that God knows what he is doing. That is the first way to live.

The second way to live is to be found in v9. "Because I have sinned against him, I will bear the LORD's wrath". Second point: **admit that you deserve God's judgement.**

This is the opposite of denial. Denial is a terrible thing – whether it is your financial affairs, or an addiction, or your health. Denial is a trap; honesty is a release – it is the beginning of finding the way out. Micah here is not making any excuses – he is clearly a very different person from the rapacious rulers and the lying preachers we have met in previous weeks – he *could* say that he is much better than them. But actually Micah says that he knows that he is a sinner as well. He says that he too deserves God's anger.

Personally I moved from hating Jesus' message to loving it, when I moved out of denial about myself. I was a monumentally arrogant young person. I used think that I was the nicest 14 year old that I knew. I thought that I was good. And that God should be pleased with me. And when I heard that Jesus offer was forgiveness for bad people, I thought that this was a message for other people. Not for me. Until God opened my eyes, and I saw myself for who I really was. An arrogant fool. Someone in desperate need of forgiveness. Someone who deserved God's judgement.

Micah is not playing when he said this. Micah's hometown was destroyed by the Assyrians. Micah, along with all others in his town starved when the Assyrians swept through the land. There was no place for Micah to have a nice comfy time; he too had to shelter in the cellar as the bombs fell as the global superpower devastated all that was around him. And Micah knows that in the future Babylon is going to come and destroy all of his land. He doesn't know when – but his attitude in v9 is astonishing. Whatever God decides is right. You are not going to hear Micah complaining. Micah knows that he deserves to face the consequences, along with everyone else.

He knows that when the new creation comes at the end of time, that he will be in it, and that God wants him there – but before then, he knows that destruction is coming. Micah knows that he will have to suffer, along with everyone else. There is no free ticket for believers that means that they can miss out on all the suffering.

Friends, I hardly need tell you that **we** don't live in Ukraine. We should give thanks that we don't have the artillery pounding our homes to dust. We must pray for those poor people. But we **all** live in a world that is under God's judgement. We all experience the pain and frustrations that are common to those who live in this world. Illness; family strife; worries about money and job insecurity. Death. Our church notice sheet always has a long list of people who need our prayers. It is a constant reminder that we live in a world that is under God's judgement.

But, Micah is not without hope. Look at how v9 goes on "I will bear the Lord's wrath, until he pleads my case and upholds my cause. He will bring me out into the light; I will see his righteousness."

Isn't that an extraordinary thing to say! Here is waiting for God to execute justice. How can he say this? Why – because he knows the God who bears sin. That is the third point. **The God who bears sin**

This book is all about the kind of God that we believe in. Because of what God is like at his very core, we **can** have hope. And here at the very end of the book – in verse 18 – we are given the theme tune – which is "Who is a God like you". That is what Micah's own name means "Who is like Yahweh".

All through the book, the big question – the big puzzle for God to solve – has been sin. The big unanswered question throughout the book has been, how can God get us to be the perfect people who can live with him; the cleaned up people who can be with God's king?

Here is how. Here in v18 we have the final word on God's character. "Who is a God like you, who pardons sin and forgives the transgression of the remnant of his inheritance? You do not stay angry for ever but delight to show mercy.¹⁹ You will again have compassion on us; you will tread our sins underfoot and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea."

That is how you can believe in a God of judgement, and yet not be gloomy and despair.

But the translation we have here isn't ideal. It has obscured what I think is Micah's best idea. The key point in v9 was that we should be willing to **bear** God's wrath, God's anger. We should be willing to pick up responsibility for what we do and put it on our own shoulder if you like. Carry it – and not complain.

But what you can't see is that same word is here in v18. The first – key idea to know about God – is that he **bears** sin. In the NIV it says "pardons" but in the Hebrew it says that God "**bears** sin". No one is like God – because what God does, when he sees our sin and our wrongdoing, is that he picks it up, and he carries it. The result is that we end up pardoned. But the key idea here is that God bears our sin for us.

The result here is permanent and dramatic. He bears it for us; in v19 he then steps on it – he stamps on it and kills it – and then throws it into the sea and drowns it, so that you can never ever find it again. Is that a good idea?! God is so committed to forgiving you and having you with him forever in his perfect new creation that he is going to lift your sin off you; and place it

onto – well we now know that he will place it onto his son, the Lord Jesus. He will carry it for us; carry God's anger, carry our guilt, so that we are utterly secure in our forgiveness.

Until the new creation we will have to wait; wait for God. We will have to live with the consequences of our sin as we inhabit this broken, messed up world. But this is a hopeful place to be – if we will come out of denial and admit our sin.

Let's pray together

Thank you Lord that you sent your only son, the Lord Jesus into this world. And that he offers to pick up and carry our sin. And we ask that we would turn to him, not in denial and with excuses, but in honest repentance and trust. And that we would ask him to carry our sin for us. And that we love you for it, and that we would love telling others of this great message of salvation. Amen