

Jan 19, 2019

## Micah 2

God of Justice:  
Justice Served

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What is the **greatest commandment** in the Bible? “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.” (Matt 22:37) What is the **second** greatest commandment? “Love your neighbor as yourself.” (Matt 22:39) So the greatest commandments are “love God” and “love others.”

What is **idolatry**? Idolatry is when we **break** the first and greatest commandment. It’s when we love anything more than God. Our sermon series is *God of Justice*. What is **injustice**? It’s when we break the second greatest commandment. Injustice is anytime we **fail** to love our neighbor.

So at the end of the day this sermon series is meant to help us **love God more** and love our **neighbor better**. That’s the whole point of Christianity. Love God. Love others. So last week when I asked you to answer my **survey** “What’s an **idol** our culture worships?” and “What’s an **injustice** our culture commits?” you were simply listing ways we as a **society** don’t love God first and fail to love others as they **deserve**.

I’m excited to share the **results** of the **survey** with you, and I will, in just a **little bit**. But first **Micah 1** tells us that the Israelite nations has **failed to love God** too. Remember the **Israelite nation** was made up of **twelve tribes** but in **930 BC** they had a **civil war** and split into north and south just like **America** almost did.<sup>1</sup> **Chapter one** reveals that the northern kingdom fell into **idol-worship**. Because of this God promises that Samaria, the capital of northern Israel, will be destroyed.

### **Micah 1:6-7a**

6 “Therefore I will make Samaria a heap of rubble,  
a place for planting vineyards.  
I will pour her stones into the valley  
and lay bare her foundations.  
7 All her idols will be broken to pieces;  
all her temple gifts will be burned with fire;  
I will destroy all her images. (NIV®)

In **722 BC** the nation of **Assyria** destroyed Samaria and took its people into **exile**, fulfilling this prophecy. In the second part of Micah 1 the prophet addresses **southern Judah** for her sins. She’s stopped loving God and loving her neighbor. For this Judah will also go into **exile**.

### **Micah 1:16**

Shave your head in mourning  
for the children in whom you delight;  
make yourself as bald as the vulture,  
for they will go from you into exile. (NIV®)

And that’s eventually what happens. Samaria falls in **722 BC** to **Assyria** and Jerusalem and falls in **586 BC** to **Babylon** and the people of Judah are deported and exiled. But remember Micah’s prophetic ministry took place sometime between **750** and **686 BC**.<sup>2</sup> So this second exile hasn’t happened **yet**. And now as we come to **chapter two** the prophet begins to explain why Jerusalem too will face exile. Samaria worshipped **golden calves**. Judah hasn’t done that. They worship at the one true **temple**. So what have they done?

All Scriptures are quoted from the New International Version (NIV®) unless otherwise noted.

## Judah's sin - Unjust seizure of the most vulnerable's land and homes. (1-2, 8-9)

**1** Woe to those who plan iniquity,  
to those who plot evil on their beds!  
At morning's light they carry it out  
because it is in their power to do it.  
**2** They covet fields and seize them,  
and houses, and take them.  
They defraud people of their homes,  
they rob them of their inheritance. (NIV®)

God is sending the remaining Israelite people, Judah, into exile because of their “**iniquity**.” The Hebrew word for “iniquity” is “**avon**.” The Bible Project's word study of avon say that iniquity means “**crooked behavior**” like **corruption** and **injustice** and that's exactly what we find in verses 1-2. The **powerful** in Jerusalem are laying awake at night figuring out how they can take for themselves the **fields** and **homes** of the **poor and vulnerable**. Verses **8-9** tell us they defraud everyone—**men, women, and children**.

The rich are **coveting** what the poor have. Can any of you think of a famous set of commandments where God prohibits coveting? **The Ten Commandments**. Do you know which commandment it is? The **tenth**. A way to remember that is **10** stands for **best** and we're not to covet our **neighbor's best**.

**Exodus 20:17** “You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male or female servant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor. (NIV®)

There's another **tragic story** in the Bible of a **Samaritan king** named **Ahab** who coveted a **vineyard** near his **palace**. He offered to purchase the land from the owner, **Naboth**.

**1 Kings 21:2-3** Ahab said to Naboth, “Let me have your vineyard to use for a vegetable garden, since it is close to my palace. In exchange I will give you a better vineyard or, if you prefer, I will pay you whatever it is worth.”

**3** But Naboth replied, “The Lord forbid that I should give you the inheritance of my ancestors.” (NIV®)

Houses and land weren't like what they are in our **culture today**. We can **buy** and **sell** homes and property with **relative ease**. But property in Israel belonged to families for **generations**. Remember this is an **agrarian society**. There's **no industrial revolution**. People lived off **farms** and what they could **produce** from the **land**. For Naboth to sell his vineyard would mean he would sell his livelihood and the property that had been in his family for **generations** and was meant to **sustain** them for generations to come.

Unfortunately, Ahab is an **evil king** and he allows his wife **Jezebel** to hatch a **plot to murder** Naboth and take his vineyard. God judges Ahab for this injustice by putting him and Jezebel **to death** and by ending his family's **kingship** (1 kings 21:19, 29; 22:38). If God judges Ahab and puts him to death for stealing Naboth's field he is more than willing to do the same thing to those stealing the poor's land years later.

Like Ahab, the rich and powerful take advantage of the weak “**at morning's light**.” Usually when you **commit a crime** you do it at **night**. This tells us they performed their **corrupt practices** in the daylight when others could see either because **everyone** was **corrupt** or because what they did was **legal** according to the **laws** of the day. But just because something is legal doesn't mean it's **right**.

I read the book Just Mercy by Bryan Stevenson last summer as I was thinking about this sermon series. It is by far one of the best books I've ever read on **defending** the most **vulnerable** and **at risk**. If you read it

will make you both **furious** and **hopeful** at the same time.<sup>3</sup> Bryan Stevenson founded the *Equal Justice Initiative* (EJI). He's argued cases before the **Supreme Court** and says this about poverty and justice.

*"My work with the poor and the incarcerated has persuaded me that the opposite of poverty is not wealth; the opposite of poverty is justice. Finally, I've come to believe that the true measure of our commitment to justice, the character of our society, our commitment to the rule of law, fairness, and equality cannot be measured by how we treat the rich, the powerful, the privileged, and the respected among us. The true measure of our character is how we treat the poor, the disfavored, the accused, the incarcerated, and the condemned."* - Bryan Stevenson, *Just Mercy*

If you don't have time to read a whole book you can read [Stories of Just Mercy](#) on his website or watch the [Netflix documentary 13th](#), which features Bryan talking about the **American prison system**. It has made me **grateful** for the recent **federal prison reform**, [the First Step Act](#), which our Congress and President passed. Why should we care about these things? Because it is iniquity (**crookedness**) to **deny justice** to the poor and needy. God takes very seriously the actions of those who steal, yesterday and today. How so for Judah?

### **God's judgment - Those who steal land will lose their land. (3-5)**

3 Therefore, the Lord says:

"I am planning disaster against this people,  
from which you cannot save yourselves.  
You will no longer walk proudly,  
for it will be a time of calamity.

4 In that day people will ridicule you;  
they will taunt you with this mournful song:  
'We are utterly ruined;  
my people's possession is divided up.  
He takes it from me!  
He assigns our fields to traitors.'"

5 Therefore you will have no one in the assembly of the Lord  
to divide the land by lot. (NIV®)

God demonstrates **perfect fairness** towards those **who steal from the poor**. What does God do? He takes their land and homes. That's exactly what happens when generations later Judah goes into exile and those who practiced injustice lose their their land. **Justice served**.

What are **similar** idols and injustices we see today? I want to share what we as a church answered for to the **survey question** I gave last week: "What's an **idol** our culture worships?" Now I went through the answers and **summarized** them. You said idols our culture worships are (31 total answers):

**Cellphones/Social Media** - 8 (26%)  
**Fame/Beauty** - 5 (16%)  
**Success/Money/Power** - 10 (32%)  
**Comfort** - 4 (13%)  
**Individualism/Self** - 3 (10%)  
**Patriotism** - 1 (3%)

What I **love** about your answers is that you thought of things I wouldn't think of, like **iPhones**. iPhones can totally be **little idols**. I mean we spend time **staring** at them, holding them to our **faces**, they emit an **eerie**

**glow... We want them. They are status symbols. And they control our lives. What do you think the corresponding injustice is to these idols? One injustice is the increase in teen depression in the US between 2010 and 2015 with the rise of **smartphones**. Did you know that in that time “the number of US teens who felt **useless and joyless** - classic symptoms of **depression** - **surged 33%**”? “Teen **suicide attempts** increased **23%**” and sadly teens who carried it to completion **increased 31%**. More teens looking at their phones instead of forming **face-to-face relationships** can be deadly.<sup>4</sup>**

What about “What’s an **injustice** our culture commits?” It was a lot more **difficult** to put these **categories** together so you can probably see there was a lot of **overlap** (30 answers).

**Abortion** - 5 (17%)

**Not caring for the poor and needy** - 6 (20%)

**Mistreatment of the other—the disabled, weak, and outsider** - 5 (17%)

**Racism, bigotry, prejudice** - 8 (27%) (*bigotry means intolerance of other’s opinions*)

**Profit over people, national debt** - 3 (10%)

**Not putting Jesus/God first** - 3 (10%)

I may share some **quotes** from your survey results as we continue to go through this series. Overall I’m **grateful** to see how God has given our community a **soft-heart** towards those who are **vulnerable**. We as the church are the **messenger** to the culture. We should be the first ones to **stand up** when an injustice happens and say “**that’s not right!**” But we may **not be welcomed** with open arms. **Micah wasn’t**.

## **Judah’s sin - Rejecting God’s message and messenger. (6, 11)**

In verses 6-7 the **false prophets** tell Micah to stop prophesying. They don’t like his message. They don’t want to hear it so they tell him to “**shut up.**” Micah **openly insults** them in verse 11.

**11** If a liar and deceiver comes and says,  
‘I will prophesy for you plenty of wine and beer,’  
that would be just the prophet for this people!

You **want** a preacher who will tell you what you **want to hear**. You want a prophet who will promise you **wealth, health, and a great retirement**. You want a pastor who says you can have your **best life now**. Micah is condemning **prosperity gospel** preaching, plain and simple. The prosperity gospel is the idea that God wants to give you **everything you want** in this life. **Money** is the idol and it can and has created **grave injustices**. In **2009** the **Atlantic** published an article that asked if **prosperity-gospel churches** helped cause the **subprime mortgage crisis**. They reported how **Wells Fargo** specifically targeted churches.

*The plan was to send officers to guest-speak at church-sponsored “wealth-building seminars” [...] and dazzle the participants with the possibility of a new house. They would tell pastors that for every person who took out a mortgage, \$350 would be donated to the church, or to a charity of the parishioner’s choice. “They wouldn’t say, ‘Hey, Mr. Minister. We want to give your people a bunch of subprime loans,” [a loan officer] told me. “They would say, ‘Your congregants will be homeowners! They will be able to live the American dream!’” (Did Christianity Cause the Crash? The Atlantic, December 2009)*

The **true message** of the **Bible** is not one of prosperity and peace in this life. In fact, our faith often calls for **sacrifice** and **self-denial**. That’s not a message we **naturally** want to hear (2 Tim 4:3-4). Because they didn’t want to hear a hard message from God, God judges them. May this never be us.

## **God’s judgment - Loss of the temple and exile. (7, 10)**

The people of Israel believed that God would **never leave them**. They're the **descendants** of **Jacob** (v7) and they worship at the **true temple**. God **can't abandon** them. But God is going to **destroy the temple** and send them away into **exile**.

10 Get up, go away!  
For this is not your resting place,  
because it is defiled,  
it is ruined, beyond all remedy.

If you claim to know the one true God's, but really proclaim a **false gospel** don't be surprised if God leaves you and destroys his temple. **But** this is not how this prophecy **ends**. At the end the end of this passage Micah prophesies **God himself** will lead his people out of exile.

### **Hope restored - The Lord will gather his people and lead them home. (12-13)**

12 "I will surely gather all of you, Jacob;  
I will surely bring together the remnant of Israel.  
I will bring them together like sheep in a pen,  
like a flock in its pasture;  
the place will throng with people.

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 before them,  
the Lord at their head."

Yes the people of Judah and Jerusalem are going to be taken into **captivity** in **Babylon**, but a **Shepherd-King** is going to come and **gather** his **sheep**, lead them out of **captivity**, and bring them **home**. This Shepherd-King isn't going to be just any man, but **Yahweh himself**, the "**LORD**."

Is this prophecy fulfilled? In the **short-term** God does return his people to Jerusalem in 536 BC. But Yahweh isn't their king. In the **mid-term** God does come to **rescue us**. Jesus comes into our world as the **Shepherd King**, as our **Good Shepherd**. He leads us, his **flock**, by **breaking us free** from our **sin** and **captivity**. He does so by dying on the **cross** and **rising again** so that anyone who **repents** and **believes in Jesus** will **receive eternal life**. Jesus takes the penalty for our sins. **Justice served!** Now he is **seated** on the **throne** as **King** preparing the the **long-term victory**. A day is **coming** that we see **pictured** in the book of **Revelation** (Rev 7, 21). **King Jesus** is going to **return, gather all his people**, and **break us free** from sin and captivity **once and for all**. *The Lord will gather his people and lead us home.*

*Pastor [Jonathan Romig](#) preached this message at Cornerstone Congregational Church. You can download a PDF copy of this sermon above, which includes further endnotes and references. [Click to listen to sermons](#) or to read [our story](#).*

<sup>1</sup> The Bible Initiative. <http://www.thebibleinitiative.com/northern-kingdom/> Accessed 2019.01.16. “Ten tribes make up the northern kingdom of Israel: Asher, Dan, Ephraim, Gad, Issachar, Manesseh, Naphtali, Reuben, Simeon, Zebulun. Two tribes make up the southern kingdom of Judah: Judah and Benjamin.”

<sup>2</sup> Zondervan NIV Study Bible, Micah Introduction: Date and Addressees. Kindle Location 211263.

<sup>3</sup> Skye Jethani also said something like this in one of the Holy Post podcasts. He helped get me interested in this book.

<sup>4</sup> Twenge, Jean. *Are smartphones causing more teen suicides?* *The Guardian*. Published May 24 2018. <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2018/may/24/smartphone-teen-suicide-mental-health-depression> Accessed Jan 17 2019.