

Where is the Lord Our God?

Scripture Text: Micah 7:8-17

Introduction

Where is God when there is trouble? Have you wondered that? Maybe you are asking that question now as you try to understand events in the world and in your own life. That was probably a question the Israelites asked themselves during the time of Micah. It was a dark and painful time. They were enduring much suffering. Micah began chapter seven, the last chapter in the book, with a psalm of lament. He said, "Woe is me!" The people were treating one another terribly. The leaders were taking advantage of the people. Neighbor was rising against neighbor. Even families were in disarray. Husbands and wives could not trust one another. Parents and children were treating each other with contempt, as though they were enemies. If we were living during that time, we would cry out along with Micah, "Woe is me!" We might even cry out to God, "Where are you in all of this?" How many of you have been to that place in your life where you did not know what to do or how to get beyond it?

What had brought God's people to this situation? Simply put, they had! The people were engaging in all sorts of wickedness. In the books of Kings and Chronicles, we read of the rebellion of God's people. The leaders did what was evil in the sight of God. They worshipped false gods and made the people sin against God. They treated one another wickedly. Micah wrote that the Lord was coming, but He was not coming to save Israel from her enemies. God was coming to deal with Israel as His enemy. God had good reason to be angry with His people. They had turned from Him. The pain and suffering they were enduring was God's punishment on them for years of disobedience and rebellion. But, was there any hope in the midst of pain and suffering? Yes! Micah reminds us that the God who punishes us for turning away from Him, is the same God who restores us. We see both the judgment of God and the mercy of God: judgment to punish His people *for their sin*, and mercy to save and restore His people *from their sin*. After his lament, Micah revealed to us the hope he has in God

Psalm of Trust (vss. 8-10)

Micah began his lament earlier this chapter with "Woe," but he ended it with hope. Micah answered his lament, "*I will look to the LORD; I will wait for the God of my salvation; my God will hear me.*" That must have taken some courage and faith to say in the midst of crisis. Micah trusted that God would save him. He sang of this trust in God. This may be difficult to do when in the midst of trouble. How many feel like praising and trusting God when disaster happens? My first reaction is often, "Why, God did you let this happen to me?" I suspect that is true for many of you. We excel at singing "Woe is me," but Micah acknowledged God's faithfulness and declared his trust in the Lord during Israel's darkest hour:

Micah 7:8 *Rejoice not over me, O my enemy; when I fall, I shall rise; when I sit in darkness, the LORD will be a light to me.*

Israel's enemies may have had the upper hand at that time, but only because God allowed it. God's people would rise again. Micah trusted God to faithfully restore His people one day. Even the darkness they were experiencing would not last, for not only would the Lord bring them out of their darkest hour, *He would be their light*. We should not overlook the honesty by which Micah declared this trust in God. He was not avoiding the reason for Israel's crisis. Remember, Israel brought this disaster upon themselves by refusing to faithfully serve God as His chosen people. Micah confessed sin *on behalf* of the nation saying, *"I will bear the indignation of the LORD because I have sinned against him."* (Micah 7:9) He trusted God to deliver Israel from their suffering, but he also acknowledged the reason they were there in the first place. No one likes to be punished. We do not look forward to it. But Micah knew that Israel had sinned against God and were now reaping what they sowed. They deserved to be punished.

The truth is we cannot just sweep away sin. We cannot just ignore what has happened to bring us to a bad situation. Repentance is required. For us to receive God's help requires that we humbly come before Him and admit when we are wrong. How often do we plead with God to help us and not acknowledge how we got ourselves into a mess in the first place? If we do not learn from our past, and change it, we are doomed to repeat it. We must first agree with God when we have done wrong, repent of our sin, and then trust Him to forgive us. Micah was willing to patiently bear the Lord's punishment until He restored His people. Though they fell, they would rise again. Though they were in darkness, God would be their light. Like a good father, God disciplines His children, but He does not give them up to despair. When times are tough, when all hope seems lost, God says, *"Trust in me!"* In our darkest hour, God is our light.

A Promise of Restoration (vss. 11-13)

In verse ten, Micah wrote that Israel's enemy will see their fate and taunt them. Like some, when they see you enduring some difficulty they just say, "See, I told you so," or, "See, you are getting what you deserve." Micah wrote the following:

Micah 7:10 *Then my enemy will see, and shame will cover her who said to me, "Where is the LORD your God?" My eyes will look upon her; now she will be trampled down like the mire of the streets.*

When I was about ten, my family and I went to Disneyworld. At that time, I loved Mickey Mouse. I could not think of anything more important to do than to see Mickey. During one of the parades around the castle in the Magic Kingdom, I saw Mickey Mouse and off I was following him...*without my parents*. I eventually realized that my parents were not with me. I was alone. The parade went in a circle around the castle, so my mom and dad eventually saw me, took me, and then punished me...in front of everyone. I endured the shame of my wrongdoing, but, I had left them and put myself in that predicament. They had not left me. Likewise, Israel bore scorn and punishment because she had left God.

Israel's enemies taunted them by asking, "Where is the Lord you God?" It was like them saying, "Your supposed to be God's chosen people, and look at you."

Where is your God now?" When Israel was suffering, her enemies understood this to mean that their God was no where, that He didn't exist, or that He was so weak that He was unable to save them. Perhaps Israel's enemies did not realize that this situation was a direct result of their rebellion to God. Israel had left God; He had not left them. After Micah sang of his trust in God, he spoke on behalf of God about the restoration of His people and the rebuilding of their city. They were enduring the shame and scorn of the nations, but the triumph of the wicked would be short. Israel's shame would be turned to joy, and likewise, their enemies' joy would eventually be turned to shame. Just as God was punishing Israel for their sin and rebellion, God would also punish the other nations for their wickedness. They would be treated as mud trampled in the streets.

We see two specific things that God promised Israel in their future day of restoration: 1) Their walls would be rebuilt and 2) their boundaries would be extended. If this literally referred to the walls of Jerusalem, this was partly fulfilled when Nehemiah restored its walls. However, we can probably view this also as when God restores His people, He would be a wall of protection to them, like the walls of a city protect the people from its enemies. Beyond the security God provides to His people, they would become so large and prosperous that the city would expand beyond its walls. Part of this expansion might be the large number of people who would gather back into the city of God. Micah wrote:

Micah 7:12 *In that day they will come to you, from Assyria and the cities of Egypt, and from Egypt to the River, from sea to sea and from mountain to mountain.*

There would be a massive flood of people streaming to God's city. The people will come from Assyria and Egypt, two enemies of Israel. God rescued His people from Egypt in the past, and He was going to rescue His people from the Assyrians in the future. Essentially, Micah was saying that the people would come from everywhere to the city of God. This is very similar to what Micah wrote in chapter four where he said "*peoples shall flow to [the mountain of God], and many nations shall come, and say: 'Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord.'*" (Micah 4:1-2) People will come to God for safety that is found only within His presence. As for the unbelievers of the world, there will be a horrible desolation because of their evil deeds. Outside of God's presence, there is only desolation, pain, and destruction. Like Israel, they will bring the devastation on themselves.

A Prayer and a Response (vss. 14-17)

Micah spoke of his patient trust in God during those difficult circumstances, and then recounted the promise of restoration when he would be secured and blessed in the presence of God. Micah then prayed to God:

Micah 7:14 *Shepherd your people with your staff, the flock of your inheritance, who dwell alone in a forest in the midst of a garden land; let them graze in Bashan and Gilead as in the days of old.*

Micah had already prophesied earlier about a Shepherd-King from the little town of Bethlehem. Here Micah prayed to God that as the Royal Shepherd He would

care for His people with his staff. The shepherd's staff was something used to protect his flock of sheep. Micah prayed that God, as the Good Shepherd, would protect His people. God's Shepherd-King will gather His flock one day; He will restore them, protect them and He will provide for them. Micah reminded God's people that He has already been their Shepherd in the past referring to the time when God rescued them out of Egypt. God had been leading His people all along, out of bondage, through the wilderness, and now in the midst of pain and suffering that they had caused. God was going to not only protect them, but also provide for them, as He had done in the past. And when the nations see God's wonders, when they see Him restoring His people, and being their Shepherd, they would be ashamed. Micah declared:

Micah 7:16 *The nations shall see and be ashamed of all their might; they shall lay their hands on their mouths; their ears shall be deaf.*

Those who had once scorned the Israelites during their destruction and taunted them with, "Where is the Lord your God," would be ashamed when they see God's redemption and restoration of His people. They might be ashamed of their own efforts to resist him. They lay their hands on their mouths in awe and amazement and they turn in fear to the Lord. That is what should happen to us. When we realize that we are wrong to leave God, to try to live our lives apart from Him, we ought to be ashamed at how we could have done that. Like the nations in Micah's prophecy, we need to acknowledge our defeat in turning from God and turn back to Him in holy fear. God's promise is to restore people to a right relationship with Him if they only repent and turn to Him.

Conclusion

In closing, where is the Lord our God when things are difficult? Where is He when there is pain and suffering? Where is He when others mock us or when we leave Him to follow our own sinful desires? Do you feel like those who wondered, "Where is God in all of this?" The answer is that God is right where He always is: right here waiting for His people to return to Him. The real question is, "Where are you?" Have you left God? Have you turn from Him to something else? Are you seeking fulfillment in something else: work, money, and pleasure? The truth of God's Word is that these things cannot satisfy you. When we replace God with something temporary in this world, we are only asking for a world of pain and suffering. We were created to worship Him and to receive our greatest pleasure by desiring Him most of all.

Where is God when things are bad? He is waiting for you to turn to Him. God has not left us. Far from it, He is seeking us and drawing us to have an intimate relationship with Him. God sent His one and only Son that whosoever believes in Him will be adopted into His family and have genuine fellowship with Him. He is right where He has always been, gathering, restoring, protecting, and shepherding His people. Jesus is the Good Shepherd Who laid His life for His sheep. Salvation is from Him. Will you come to Him today? Will you return to Him today? May it be so! Amen!