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**C1106 – February 23, 2011 – Micah 7:1-6**  
**The Loyal Have Perished**

Alright, let's turn in our Bible to Micah 7. We're coming to the close of this prophet whose ministry spanned 50 years. He ministered during the reign of Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah and these kings had co-regents and vice-regents at times so to get the historical setting we want to remember that most of these kings were absolute disasters. The only one that was not a disaster was Hezekiah. Hezekiah issued reforms during his reign that staved off the judgment on Jerusalem until 586BC. Judgment came right up to the gates of Jerusalem in 701BC with the Assyrian warlord Sennacherib, but the Lord answered Hezekiah's prayers and struck down 185,000 Assyrian soldiers in one night. So Sennacherib went home with his tail between his legs. It tells us what a little bit of faithfulness can do. God is ready to pour out blessing on those who will respond positively to Him. Now after Sennacherib went home defeated Isaiah tells us that Hezekiah became mortally ill and it looked like he's going to the grave but Hezekiah offers another prayer to the Lord and the Lord extended his life for 15 years. So from 701BC down to 686BC Hezekiah is going to continue to be the king, formally, but he's not in good health even though he's alive, and so his son Manasseh takes over as vice-regent. To be vice-regent meant that the son ruled with the father, but with the father in a subordinate position. So really Manasseh took over and point by point he dismantled all the reforms his father Hezekiah had made. So it's Manasseh who is reigning in the first six verses of chapter 7. And Micah is having to walk around in the mess caused by Manasseh.

Verse 1, **Woe is me! For I am Like the fruit pickers, like the grape gatherers. There is not a cluster of grapes to eat, Or a first-ripe fig which I crave.** Who is **me?** Who is **I?** It's Micah the prophet and he's walking around Judah and everywhere he goes it's like a barren orchard. And

he doesn't mean physically, it may be barren physically, but what he means is spiritually. Spiritually the land is destitute. It's like an orchard after the harvest and like a vineyard after the vintage. It's barren. **Woe is me! For I am like the fruit pickers, like the grape gatherers. There is not a cluster of grapes to eat, or a first ripe fig which I crave.** There is nothing left but the gleaning, a fig here, a cluster there, but very sparse, few and far between. And what it all means is that at this time all the godly people were gone, there were none righteous, no not one, the godly had perished.

Now in verse 2 he puts into plain words the meaning of verse 1, **The godly person has perished from the land, And there is no upright person among men. All of them lie in wait for bloodshed; Each of them hunts the other with a net.** Let's look at the Hebrew for **godly person. The godly person has perished from the land.** The Hebrew for **godly** is *chesed* and it's our word for "loyal." There are no loyal people in the land. The loyal people have all perished from the land. Who are loyal people? It's a legal term that refers to obedience to a law or standard. What's the law or standard Micah is referring to? The Mosaic Law. The Mosaic Law is a standard that reveals the righteousness of God. It is a revelation of who God is. And it was God's will that they learn this Law, that they meditate on it day and night and not swerve from it to the right or to the left, but be careful to do all that is written in it, that is, to learn loyalty to Him, to be obedient to this Law. When did they get this Law? They got it at Mt Sinai. So let's bring in our framework here. The nation had been enslaved to Egypt for 400 years and God delivered them from Egypt at the Exodus. What did the nation have to do to be delivered from Egypt? Nothing. They didn't have to lift a finger. It was all grace. God took an enslaved, beaten, run down people and set them free from the greatest superpower on earth. Step by step God systematically dismantled Egypt leaving it a desolation and Israel walked out free and with the entire Egyptian Fort Knox. Now think of that great event. It was all grace. Israel didn't do any works, God didn't ask them to do any works. So the Exodus is a picture of grace. Then they marched to Mt Sinai. God led them there by a pillar of fire by night and cloud by day. Again it was all grace. Why did He bring them to Mt Sinai? Because here He's going to reveal to them the Law, His will for their lives. So now we can talk about obedience, we can talk about works, we can talk about learning loyalty to Him. We don't start off talking about that, we start off talking about grace, God always does

something for us first before He ever asks us to do anything for Him. It's always grace first, then law and even then He gives grace to help us fulfill the law.

Turn to Exod 20:1. Having brought them out of Egypt does God have the right to ask them to obey His law? Of course He does? God did a great thing for this nation; He set them free from an evil, oppressive power. Now in that situation is it too much for God to ask them to obey Him? Look at the argument God is making in the first commandment. This is the Ten Commandments and the First commandment does not begin with verse 3, the first commandment begins with verse 1, "Then God spoke all these words," it uses the word "words" and that's why technically these are known as the Ten Words not the Ten Commandments. "Then God spoke all these words, saying, 2 "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. 3 You shall have no other gods before Me. 4 You shall not make for yourself an idol..." Now thinking what this people just came through do you see the argument God is making. He's not saying, you obey Me or else. He could say that. He's God, He can do whatever He wants. But He doesn't frame it that way. How does He frame it? He says, this is who I am and this is what I did for you, now don't you think you should obey Me? See how it's an appeal. God gives a motive to obey. He doesn't just say, obey Me or else. He says, I did this for you, I did that for you, now you should obey Me, you should learn loyalty to Me.

And this is what Micah is referring back to when He walks around Judah. He's walking around looking for someone, anyone that is obedient to this law, anyone that is loyal. God had a program for the nation. After He saved them at the Exodus and gave them the Law at Mt Sinai He wanted them to grow spiritually, learn loyalty to Him. So let's do a little historical review. How did the nation do? Moses got the Law and while he was getting the Law up on Mt Sinai what were the people doing at the foot of the Mt? They were breaking the Law. God says you better get down there Moses, the people have lost it. He gets down there and sees this big drunken orgy going on and the center of it all is the worship of the golden bull. They were breaking the very first commandment. So to illustrate this what did Moses do? He cast down the Ten Commandments and they broke into pieces. Why did he do that? To show them visually what they had done. It was an object lesson. You broke God's commandments. Then God says that's it, I'm doing away with this people, I'm

going to destroy them all and we'll start over with you Moses. So Moses prays, Moses actually goes head to head with God and argues with God in prayer why He should not destroy them. It is a model for prayer. You want to learn how to barter with God in prayer look at Moses' prayer. Moses, a creature, goes head to head with the Creator of the universe. And God respected that prayer and answered. A marvelous section of Scripture. But needless to say the nation was not loyal to God. That generation did not learn loyalty and they wandered around in the wilderness and died off like flies for 40 years. Then you come to the Conquest and Settlement under Joshua, here's a generation that learns partial loyalty to God. God gives them military victory in the land, though they don't take all the land they take large portions, they learn partial loyalty to God. By the time you come to the end of the Judges period the tribes are in disarray, there are warring factions among the tribes, the people are tired of the chaos, they ask for a king. God graciously gives them a king. They want a king like all the other nations. God says I'll give you a king but not like all the other nations, he's going to be the king I choose and I put limits on the office of king. He chose Saul and Saul turned out to be a moron. You can't expect a fallen king to solve problems any better than a whole nation of fallen people. They're all fallen. God chooses David, the nation builds some loyalty to God, there were pockets of loyalty in earlier generations and what happened was these pockets were growing because they built loyalty around the family not just the individual. You can have individual loyalty but you can't get anything significant going with just the individual because the individual is not the basic unit of society. The family is the basic unit of society, so you have to build family loyalty to get any kind of significant thing going so far as building a high, biblical culture. And it was David's generation that really began to produce family loyalty to God's law. Then it came to Solomon to continue to build this family loyalty and he started out well, started out real well, the culture became highly developed and biblical, they were stretching out into every arena of life; music, art, economics, biology, botany, entomology, ichthyology, architecture, etc...they were bringing the Bible to apply to all of life, they were applying the Law comprehensively and they produced the greatest culture the world has ever seen. But Solomon blew it, he started to import foreign girls and whenever you do that you don't just import the girls, you import the pagan baggage of the girls and this set a rot in the culture and it very quickly was destroyed; it's not two generations and there's not even a vestige of a biblical culture. The kingdom collapses, they go into spiritual decline, both kingdoms

decline rapidly, God sends them prophets, they don't listen to the prophets, they decline and decline and decline until we reach Micah's day. And you get the historical situation in vv 1- 2.

What is God basically upset about? That the nation hasn't learned loyalty to His Law given at Mt Sinai. He led them out of Egypt with an uplifted arm, He destroyed nations in the Conquest, He gave them judges, He sent them prophets, He gave them a king, He gave them Saul, He gave them David. And He promised that through David would come the ideal King. All this was grace, grace, grace and did they learn loyalty to Him? No, they blew it. Now Micah is running around the land and he can't find anyone that's loyal.

Before we look at what he does find in verse 2 notice the mention of **the land**. That should strike you, because it reminds us that though the nation had divine title to the land, her enjoyment of the land depended upon loyalty. Since the nation failed to learn loyalty and there was no loyal person in the land what do you think is coming next? They're going to be kicked out of the land, they're going to go into Exile.

In verse 2, if Micah didn't find any loyal people in the land what did he find? **All of them lie in wait for bloodshed; Each of them hunts the other with a net.** It is a description of the general chaos in society. Every man, he doesn't just mean males, he means every person in Israeli society: men, women, and youth, plot and they conspire murder. **All of them lie in wait for bloodshed.** What is the sin underlying murder? If murder is the overt sin, what is the covert sin? Hatred. If we hate our brother then what we're saying is that we would rather them not be there. The next step is acting on it and murdering them. So all of these overt sins betray covert sins of the heart. It's not true that the law just addressed external behaviors. Sometimes Christians get it in their mind that the OT Law just addressed external behavior. Jesus insisted in the Sermon on the Mount that it did not. That it reached down into the heart because underlying each one of these external sins is an internal heart issue. So if all of them lie in wait for bloodshed then it's an indictment of the heart.

**All of them lie in wait for bloodshed, Each of them hunts the other with a net.** The **net** was used for hunting and fishing, they are tools to capture prey. So they always picture destruction of freedom. And when you

get in a society that is so rampant with crime all real freedom has been destroyed, everyone is doing what is right in his own eyes and society is in chaos, it's not safe to go outside, and so to knock people off you have to use complex crimes that lure people out into the open so you can trap them and murder them.

Verse 3, **Concerning evil, both hands do it well.** Both hands were to do good, both hands were to take care of the poor and the orphan and the widow. And yet both their hands did evil. Not only did they do evil, they did **it well**, meaning they had trained their hands to do evil. It's one thing to do evil; it's another thing to do it well. We all do evil; we do not all do it well. To do it well requires that we train our sinful flesh in evil. We do evil, we do some sin and then we don't confess it and get restored to fellowship and then we do it again and we don't confess it and then we do it again and we don't confess and then we do it again and we don't confess then what we're doing is we're training our sinful flesh. And eventually we get very good at evil. And this is what we mean when we say we developed a habitual sin pattern. Every time you do evil you are training your flesh in a direction and the more you do the more deeply embedded becomes this habitual sin pattern. And that means it becomes more and more difficult to get out of it. You can't just confess your sin and that's it, everything is hunky dory. Because what happens when you sin is your mind is darkened, and then you sin and it gets darker and gradually it gets darker and darker and it's subtle, so while you think you may be seeing clearly, and you think all your rational faculties are working well, they're actually working against you, blinding you to the reality of your sin and your problem and in that situation is hard, if not impossible to confess. And that's where the nation had come to. Their minds were darkened to the point that they couldn't confess their sin. They not only did evil, they did **it well**. They were well trained in the sinful flesh, they were experts in evil, they could have multiple crimes being schemed and going on simultaneously.

One example is then given of a complex evil scheme committed in the higher echelons of Israeli society, **The prince asks, also the judge, for a bribe, And a great man speaks the desire of his soul: So they weave it together.** So you have the prince, the prince is the governmental official and he goes down to the judge and pays him off because he wants a judgment against some citizen. And the great man, a rich man in society, has certain

interests in it as well and they put it all together into this grand scheme to defraud people. From the Law it was illegal to take a bribe because to take a bribe would blind your eyes to justice. And this was going on; the judges, who were supposed to know the law inside and out and apply it equally were taking bribes. This blinded them from what is truth and they started redefining right and wrong. That's the real evil, when you are legislating from the bench that what is wrong is right and what is right is wrong, you know your society has reached the most perverse kind of evil. You're rewriting standards of Law and whenever you rewrite standards of Law you re-write the nature of the Lawgiver. That is - you redefine God. And this is the most perverse kind of evil in society, a society that redefines the nature of God and then out of that, that theological evil, they redefine laws that govern society. And in a society like that you can never get true justice. The whole thing becomes one big cauldron of corruption. Think - in this society what can anybody do? If somebody gets ripped off and they take it to court, the people in the court are the grand master rip off artists. So do you think you're going to get justice? To judge justly in your case is for them to condemn their own actions. And you work your way into a situation where it's impossible to get straight a crooked society. The whole system has gone kaput. Right has been redefined as wrong and wrong has been redefined as right.

Verse 4, **The best of them is like a briar, The most upright like a thorn hedge.** What's that saying? These are the best people, the best people will rip you up, they don't care about you, they only care about themselves. I want you to observe that about this text, if all the best people in a country totally rip you off you're in big trouble. It's a completely selfish culture. Self-seeking, individualistic, and everyone gets in their own little interest groups and plots against every other little interest group. It's chaos. And this is the best people in society, the people you could trust - you only thought you could trust.

Micah says, **The day will come when you post your watchmen, Your punishment will come.** Now, the watchmen refer to two kinds of men in the Scriptures. Those who would keep watch over them physically and those who would keep watch over them spiritually. The man who kept watch over them physically was the soldier, he was a member of the IDF, the Israeli Defense Forces, and his job would be to sit high up on the walls of Jerusalem and keep watch over the city and if he saw danger approaching he would alert the authorities. So their job was to watch over the city and if some

physical danger approached, a military threat was approaching, they would notify the high command.

Then you had the other kind of watchmen and he was a spiritual watchmen, it was his job to keep watch over the people spiritually. He was the prophet and so he would keep watch and when God spoke to him or gave him a vision or a dream he would warn the people. Sometimes he would use the lawsuit format like we saw in chapter 6, other times he would go to the king and deliver the message, but the whole point was God appointed these watchmen to watch over people's souls, to call the people back to the Law, to indict them for their failure to learn loyalty.

Now one of the characteristics of the watchmen, whether they be keeping physical watch over you or spiritual watch over you is that they be alert. It doesn't do any good to have some soldier sitting up on a wall sleeping. The only good that might come out of it is if he falls off the wall and kills himself. That way he does everyone a favor and we can get a real soldier up on the wall to keep watch. And it doesn't do any good to have a prophet who doesn't hear the voice of God. Some self-proclaimer. Just like it doesn't do any good to have a pastor who doesn't study the word of God. He can't keep watch over the spiritual well-being of people when he's asleep spiritually. He's not paying attention to the voice of God in the Scriptures. And so one of the key characteristics of a good watchmen is that he is alert. He has got to be paying attention. He has to know what the threats are. He has to know the enemy. He has to know what kind of weapons the enemy has at its disposal. He has to know lines of supply. He has to know the size of the enemy army. He has to know what vulnerabilities the city has. He has to know a whole series of things. He can't just say, I'm a watchman. He has to be trained to be a watchman if he's going to actually watch over men's souls.

And the thing about this period of Israel's history, which is the period of the Kingdoms in Decline, remember there was no loyalty in the land, and in that scenario you had true prophets and false prophets. Micah's the true prophet and he was alert, he actually watched over the spiritual well-being of Israel, because he actually heard the voice of God and he had the boldness and courage to warn the people. But then you had the false prophets and there were a whole slew of these because there were no people in the land that knew the Law so it created a vacuum that was filled by all these false



prophets, wannabe's who were just trying to make a buck. And since they didn't have any revelation from God they couldn't possibly be alert to the dangers facing the nation. They just made stuff up and they wanted to line their pockets so what did they do? They did what every self-proclaimer does? Promise blessing, blessing, blessing, tell everyone in the nation what they wanted to hear - oh, you're going to have prosperity, your economy is going to keep booming, your agriculture is going to keep on prospering, it's nothing but blue skies, and the people liked to hear this and they were getting rich. As long as you donated to him he told you all the good things. And if you didn't donate he told you that you and your family would be cursed. So everyone wanted to hear the good; they lined his pockets. And so you had true and false prophets during this period. A lot of false prophets, that was lucrative business, only a few true prophets because it was not lucrative. It is just another reason to not follow after all the people who claim to be prophets today. Watch what these people do. They ask for money, money, money and if you give me money they say God will bless you more, make you prosperous, it's all the prosperity gospel. And it's the poor people who give to them because they're always in a pinch and they'll try anything to get out. And you can tell they are false prophets because they're lining their pockets and the pattern in Scripture is that the guys that are getting filthy rich off of proclaiming prophecy are the false prophets. It's the true prophets that can't get a hearing!

Now look at the middle of verse 4 and see if it doesn't make more sense to you. **The day will come when you post your watchmen**, in other words, this is not the true prophet of God, this is the false prophet, they've been appointed by the people, they're authorized by the state. But he isn't alert. He's asleep. He's sitting up in the tower asleep and so when the destruction comes they don't give warning. Then you have the true prophets like Micah and Isaiah and they're alert. They see the path of spiritual destruction they are on and so they send a warning to the authorities and the authorities say, you're not state authorized, you don't work for the government, so would you just get out of here, you're just trying to stir everybody up. We don't like your message, it's all doom and gloom. But they were setting themselves up because Micah says in verse four, **Your punishment will come**. In other words, you didn't pay attention to the true prophets, you listened to all the false stuff and you have no idea what the true standard is, you failed to learn loyalty to me so your physical destruction **will come**. And you won't have

any idea when it comes that it was coming. It will be a total surprise attack. And then he says, **their confusion will occur**. And it means they'll just be standing around in utter astonishment. How could this happen? All the state authorized prophets said it was nothing but blue skies; prosperity, abundance; economic development. What is all this destruction? And they'll just stand around totally confused. How could this happen? And so let's go back to verse 2 and show all the connections here.

Verse 2, the theological evil, this is where it all starts. **The loyal person has perished from the land**, that is theological evil, disregard for the first table of the Law, commandments 1-3. Where does this lead? To social evil, disregard for the second table of the Law, commandments 4-10. **And there is no upright person among men**. That's social evil. The theological evil is breaking out and social evil can't be contained. The moment that theological evil begins in the heart inevitably social evil will break out until all society is chaos. As he describes, **All of them lie in wait for bloodshed; Each of them hunts the other with a net**. That's murder. Verse 3 concerning evil, **both hands do it well**. That means they have trained their sinful natures and evil. So that they not only knew how to do evil, they knew how to do it well. Verse 3 **the prince asks, also the judge, for a bribe, and a great man speaks the desire of his soul so they weave it together**. Complex crime, involving secret planning, bribery in the courts, manipulation, deception, it's chaos on a societal level that affects the standards of right and wrong. Till finally, verse 4, **The best of them is like a briar, the most upright like a thorn hedge**. Now in that kind of a society, when the best people will rip you off without thinking twice about it, what kind of condition do you think their hearts are in? They are dark, they are black, these people couldn't perceive anything correctly anymore. And so it was a perfect vacuum for these false prophets to come in. They could tell them anything and they would believe it. And they were telling them everything they wanted to hear, tell them all kinds of blessing is coming because that's what people want to hear and if you tell them cursing is coming they'll say, I just can't believe it. If you tell them their society is on the brink of collapse they'll write you off, and the reason they'll write you off is because they don't want to believe it.

It's like in this country, if you tell people we're on the brink of economic collapse they'll laugh at you. They don't believe you. You can show them all the statistics, you can draw pretty graphs but people won't believe it. Why

not? Because they don't want to believe it. You could have all the evidence pointing in that direction and they wouldn't do a single thing to prepare. They'd just sit there and pray, Oh, God bless America, God pour out Your Spirit on us or something, and God would say, what's wrong with you, are you stupid, I sent you people every sign in the book and you can't read the signs.

That's the way it was for Israel and that's why it says at the end of verse 4, **Then they're confusion will occur.** In other words they're standing there in the wake of a national disaster and they just can't believe it. How could this happen? How could we fall as a nation? What went wrong? And it just shows you how spiritually stupid they are; which we learned two weeks ago in Micah 6.

So now the true prophet, the true watchmen gives his warning. To anyone who will pay attention, the true prophet proclaims verse 5, **Do not trust in a neighbor; Do not have confidence in a friend. From her who lies in your bosom Guard your lips. <sup>6</sup>For son treats father contemptuously, Daughter rises up against her mother, Daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; A man's enemies are the men of his own house.** Notice the ascending scale of intimacy of relationship. In other words crime in every relationship. It starts with someone as distant as your **neighbor**, it moves into the circle of your **friends**, into the circle of your own wife, in verse 6 it moves into the circle of your own family, but what is he saying on a deeper level? Because you may remember that Jesus picks this up and quotes it in Matt 10. Verse 6 is loosely quoted by Jesus in Matt 10 and applied to the 1<sup>st</sup> century nation of Israel.

We can say these are very close relationships that are being broken. Why? People want to get along with other people. People want to be close to other people, there's something inside each one of us that wants to have peace with everyone else. That's why there's a cry for world peace. Can't we just all get along? Yes we can. But how? How can we get to world peace? People have to get right with God first. And if people don't get right with God first then they can't get right with people. The vertical relationship comes first then the horizontal can come. **But only in that order.** I'll quote Jacques Eullul again. I quoted this on Sunday in another lesson but here it is again so let's look at it. "From the beginning man worked desperately to have his own little

world, independent of all that God desired.” When is he referring to? When did men try to build his own little world independent of what God wanted? At the Tower of Babel. Remember the history. God said after the Flood I want you to subdue and multiply and scatter over the face of the whole earth. Is that what they did? No, that would require trust, that’s a harsh, dangerous world out there, we don’t want to go out there and build a new civilization that glorifies God. That requires me trusting Him. And I don’t know what’s out there, who knows. All I know is I’ve got to insulate myself against God. And to do that I’m going to get together with all the other people and we’ll build a kingdom of man to protect us from this intervening God. Eullul says, “Man wanted to build a city from which God would be absent, but he never managed.” What’s his point? At the Tower of Babel it’s an attempt by man to build an autonomous kingdom. You’ve seen this picture before. What does that mean? We don’t want to hear what God says. We want to dictate what reality is. We want to legislate our own kingdom independent of any so-called God. We want God out of the picture. Man is sufficient. That’s man’s fleshly desire. Always has been, always will be. And it’s exactly what Israel was trying to do in the 8<sup>th</sup> century. They were trying to build a prosperous kingdom of man and look at what it developed into. Total social chaos. This is where it will always end. This is where the world is headed once more. And apparently what God is saying is you can never, ever build an autonomous kingdom of man. Only when people are in a right relationship with God can they have a right relationship with each other. When we are then God will realize it between people. But not before. So that’s the end of Israel’s attempt to build a kingdom of man. It failed. And next week we’ll see what God has in store for the believing remnant of Israel that is in a right relationship with God.

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