

I would suggest that Micah 6:8 summarizes our passage very succinctly:

⁸ *He has told you, O man, what is good;
and what does the LORD require of you
but to do justice, and to love kindness,^[b]
and to walk humbly with your God?*

The three parts of our passage illustrate the three points of Micah 6:8
in part 1, the LORD calls for justice (verses 1-5);
in part 2, the LORD explains what covenant faithfulness is (verses 6-8);
and in part 3, the LORD says that Israel has *not* walked humbly (or wisely) (v9-16)

The word translated “humbly” only appears here in the OT,
but it would appear to mean something like “to walk prudently” –
in contrast to the folly of arrogance.

So it would probably be better to translate it “walk wisely (or prudently) with your God.”

1. Doing Justice: The LORD’s Indictment against Israel (6:1-5)

a. Summons for the Mountains to Hear (v1-2)

6 Hear what the LORD says:

*Arise, plead your case before the mountains,
and let the hills hear your voice.*

² *Hear, you mountains, the indictment of the LORD,
and you enduring foundations of the earth,
for the LORD has an indictment against his people,
and he will contend with Israel.*

Three times in the opening two verses Micah uses the word “rib” –
which is the Hebrew word for the covenant lawsuit – the case, the indictment
against Israel.

One of the common genres among the prophets is the covenant lawsuit.

After all, God established his covenant with Israel,

setting forth his commandments and promises to Israel.

If Israel believed God’s promises and obeyed God’s commands,

God would bless them and prosper them.

If Israel did not believe God’s promises and disobeyed God’s commands,

God would destroy them and send them into exile.

So the covenant lawsuit is a legal case designed to demonstrate how Israel has rebelled,
and therefore how Israel deserves judgment and exile.

The covenant lawsuit is especially prominent in Micah's contemporary, Isaiah –
and we have seen before that Micah and Isaiah share a number of common themes
(they were probably friends).

This is why Micah begins with an appeal for the mountains and the hills to *hear*.

Psalm 50:4 speaks of how God calls to the heavens above and to the earth,
that he may judge his people.

Likewise, Ezekiel 36 – which we read this morning – addresses a prophesy to the mountains,
and calls the hills to witness.

All this is rooted in Deuteronomy 27-30 –
where Moses announced the blessings and curses of the covenant –
and warned Israel not to stray from the LORD.

In Dt 30:19, Moses said,

“I call heaven and earth to witness against you today,
that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse.”

Earlier, in Dt 27, Moses had established a ritual of blessing and cursing
to be performed at Mt Ebal and Mt Gerizim (which Joshua did in Josh 8).

Now Micah calls the mountains to witness.

Mountains are a symbol of permanence.

It takes a long time for a mountain to be ground down!

Ebal and Gerizim are still there.

The mountains upon which Moses and Joshua walked –
the mountains upon which Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob walked –
can still testify that God said these things,
and that Israel refused to obey.

What is more, Joshua had written a copy of the law on the altar Mt Ebal –
which means that for years after Joshua's day,
the mountain literally bore witness against Israel!

So there is going to be a trial –

God will set forth his case against Israel,
with the mountains and the foundations of the earth as witnesses.

And the covenant lawsuit, by its nature, appeals also to the history of Israel.

In verse 3, then, God turns to address Israel.

We sang this earlier:

b. Remember the Exodus (v3-4)

³ *“O my people, what have I done to you?*

How have I wearied you? Answer me!

⁴ *For I brought you up from the land of Egypt
and redeemed you from the house of slavery,*

*and I sent before you Moses,
Aaron, and Miriam.*

God starts by asking us,
Do you have a just complaint against me?
Remember what I have done?!
I brought you out of Egypt.
I redeemed you from slavery.

There are a lot of people who think that they have a just complaint against God.
“God took my grandmother away when I was a child –
and she was the only one who loved me.”
“How could a just and loving God allow abuse and war?”

Some people do have a just complain.
Remember Job?
Job always insisted that God is just, and I am innocent –
therefore we have a problem!
And at the end of the book of Job, God says that Job spoke rightly!
And if you have a just complaint, then you (like Job) will receive vindication
in the end.

But God says that Israel does *not* have a just complaint against him.
Indeed, God turns the tables on Israel and says that he has a complaint against them!
He has been faithful to his covenant,
but they have rebelled against him.

Verse 5 follows a typical Deuteronomic way of speaking:
“remember...that you may know...”

We live in an age that says, “who needs to remember – you can just google it!”
Micah says that the people of God need to remember the story of redemption.

c. Remember Balaam and the Saving Acts of the LORD (v5)

⁵ *O my people, remember what Balak king of Moab devised,
and what Balaam the son of Beor answered him,
and what happened from Shittim to Gilgal,
that you may know the righteous acts of the LORD.”*

What does it mean to “remember”?

In English we often use the word simply in the intellectual sense:
“I remember visiting the Grand Canyon.”

In the OT, the idea of remembering and forgetting is intimately bound up with worship.
If you remember something, then you *will* do something about it.
To remember is not merely an intellectual act, but a volitional act as well.
If you remember something, it will affect your whole life.

And so God reminds Israel of Balaam and Balak.

Very little detail is given.

Micah assumes that you know the story of Balaam as well as the story of Moses.

Micah is preaching in the days of Hezekiah (ca. 700 BC).

Balaam lived more than 500 years before.

That's ancient history.

And yet Micah thinks that you should know the story of Balaam and Balak.

What is the story of Balaam and Balak?

Balak was king of Moab during the time of the wilderness wanderings.

He feared the coming of Israel.

So he hired Balaam to curse Israel.

But as Balaam was on his way to Balak,

the angel of the LORD (the Son of God)

met him on the way (remember Balaam's donkey?)

and warned him *not* to curse Israel.

So Balaam *blessed* Israel three times.

But all that is simply background to what Micah is talking about.

Because before he returned home, Balaam suggested that if Balak wanted to curse Israel

there was another way:

in Numbers 31 we discover that it was Balaam who advised the Moabites

to seek to draw Israel away from the LORD

by encouraging their daughters to seduce the Israelite men

and invite them to idolatrous worship.

This started "while Israel lived in Shittim" (Numbers 25:1) –

the infamous Baal-Peor episode of idolatry,

recounted in Psalm 106 and alluded to in Psalm 78.

Shittim is in the plains of Moab (on the east side of the Jordan),

while Gilgal is the place where Israel entered the Promised Land.

After all, the episode of Baal-Peor at Shittim is the *last* rebellion of the wilderness generation.

After the plague destroyed 24,000 at Shittim,

Numbers contains no more accounts of rebellion.

The wilderness generation is now dead.

And now the second generation will enter the promised land, led by Joshua.

If Micah had said, from Sinai to Baal-Peor,

it would emphasize the rebellion in the wilderness –

but from Shittim to Gilgal refers to how God brought Israel into the land.

This is why Micah refers to it as,

"that you may know the saving acts of the LORD."

The LORD redeemed Israel from Egypt –
and even though Balaam and Balak sought to destroy Israel –
from Shittim to Gilgal God demonstrated his “saving acts.”

Remember Balaam “that you may know the saving acts of the LORD.”

You might be tempted to say,
“But that’s Old Testament history –
as long as I know the story of Jesus, that’s what really matters!”

Jesus disagrees with that.

Jesus himself uses the story of Balaam.
In Jesus’ letter to the church at Pergamum in Revelation 2:14, he says,
“you have some there who hold the teaching of Balaam,
who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel,
so that they might eat food sacrificed to idols and practice sexual immorality.”

Jesus wants you to *remember* the stories of the Old Testament.

If you would know how to “do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with your God,”
then you need to know the story of God’s justice, kindness and wisdom,
“that you may know the saving acts of the LORD.”

If you are not currently reading the Bible together as a family,
I urge you to make a point of reading *and talking* together.
Get a good study bible (like the ESV study bible)
and pay attention to the notes and cross-references.
Start small, if you need to, and work up.
We started by reading one chapter a night –
and now, if there is time, we can often go for two or three chapters
(and it’s the kids asking for more!).

But Bible reading is *not* the same as *remembering*.

If you treat the Bible as “a quaint and curious volume of forgotten lore”
[Poe, *The Raven*], then you are missing the point.

These stories need to become part of you.

As one wise man has said, “The acts of remembering serve to actualize the past
for a generation removed in time from those former events
in order that they themselves can have an intimate encounter
with the great acts of redemption.

Remembrance equals participation” (Childs in Waltke, 383)

Because this is the story of God’s justice, kindness, and wisdom –
if we would walk with him, then we need to know *his* story.

As Jesus put it, “Do this in *remembrance* of me.”

2. Loving *Hesed*: The LORD's Requirement of Israel (6:6-8)

a. How Shall I Come before the LORD? (v6-7)

If verses 1-5 set forth the prelude to the covenant lawsuit –
reminding Israel of God's faithfulness in history,
as well as Israel's failures! –
then verses 6-8 talk about what covenant faithfulness is all about.

Now the voice shifts.

In verses 1-5, God spoke to Israel.

Now in verses 6-7, Micah speaks in the voice of Israel, replying to God:

⁶ *“With what shall I come before the LORD,
and bow myself before God on high?
Shall I come before him with burnt offerings,
with calves a year old?*

⁷ *Will the LORD be pleased with^[a] thousands of rams,
with ten thousands of rivers of oil?
Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression,
the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?”*

Verses 6-7 ask how Israel can come before God.

While everyone acknowledged that Yahweh did not physically inhabit the temple,
still, there was consensus that the way that you come before the LORD
was through the temple liturgy.

Burnt offerings and peace offerings were essential to the whole sacrificial system.

When God brought Israel out of Egypt and established his covenant with them at Sinai,
he made it clear that burnt offerings and peace offerings
were necessary for entering the presence of the LORD.

Think back to Exodus 19-23 – when the voice of the LORD caused Israel to tremble,
and no one could even touch the mountain because it was holy.

But then in Exodus 24, seventy of the elders of Israel went part way up the mountain
because of the blood of the burnt offerings and peace offerings.

As Hebrews puts it, ‘without the shedding of blood, there is no remission of sins!’

You see an escalation of sacrifices in verses 6-7:

in verse 6, shall I come before the LORD with burnt offerings –
with calves a year old (the most choice offering);

but then in verse 7, Israel ratchets up the offerings:

what about thousands of rams? (only Solomon offered numbers that high)
or ten thousand rivers of olive oil? (we have now reached the absurd!)

but the last line goes over the top:

“shall I give my firstborn for my transgression”?

The ancient world was not horrified by child sacrifice.

God was – and he condemned it and prohibited it.
But at the same time, the Passover was an annual reminder to Israel
that God had struck down the firstborn of Egypt,
and had delivered the firstborn of Israel through the Passover lamb.
So the question, “shall I give my firstborn for my transgression,”
means – shall I offer the most costly sacrifice imaginable?
“the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?”

You might think that this is over the top –
but of course this is precisely the sacrifice that God will accept!

The one thing that Israel understood is that *death* is the penalty for sin.
Someone has to die in my place in order for God’s justice to be satisfied.
We cannot offer our firstborn.
But God can – and did!

But offering sacrifices is not enough.
After all, Hezekiah made sure that the right sacrifices were being offered in Jerusalem.
So God wants to make it clear that just offering sacrifices does not bring you to God.

If you offer all the right sacrifices, but lack the proper disposition and character,
then your sacrifice will *not* be accepted.

And so in verse 8, Micah answers Israel:

b. Do Justice, Love Kindness, Walk Humbly (v8)
⁸ *He has told you, O man, what is good;
and what does the LORD require of you
but to do justice, and to love kindness,^[b]
and to walk humbly with your God?*

I say that Micah answers *Israel*,
but the use of *adam* – “man” – is interesting.

The expression: to *walk* with God is found only in Genesis 5 (Enoch)
and Genesis 6 (Noah).

And in Genesis 5-6, both Enoch and Noah are compared with what Adam was supposed to be
(after all, God *walked* with Adam in the garden).

So is Micah speaking to Israel – or to all humanity?
The solution is to see that Israel *is* the new humanity –
the new humanity as it took shape before the coming of the second Adam.
Israel was called to be all that Adam failed to be.
Israel was supposed to be the second Adam
(that’s why God put Israel in the Land with a call to obey and serve him).
And what God called Israel to do and to be

is nothing less than what God called Adam to do and to be:
do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with your God.

So when says, “he has told you, O man” –
he is addressing Israel,
but he is addressing Israel as the second Adam –
as the new “man.”

After all, Adam failed to listen to the “good” when God told him in the garden.
And now Israel has failed to listen to the “good” as revealed to Moses.

Micah 6:8 belongs on the short list of the basic summaries of what God requires of his people:
Jesus said, Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength,
and love your neighbor as yourself –
on these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets.

John says it this way: “And this is his commandment,
that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another,
just as he has commanded us.” (1 John 3:23)

Paul says that the purpose of his ministry was:
“Love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith”
(1 Tim 1:5)

Micah 6:8 is that sort of text –
this is the basic thing that God requires of those who would be *his people*.

Do justice.

We saw throughout the first part of Micah that Israel’s judges and prophets and priests
were *not* doing justice.

Doing justice means looking out for the little guy –
making sure that those who lack power are not crushed by the arrogant.

For those of you in school,
doing justice means coming to the aid of the one who is being bullied,
or speaking up for the unpopular.

Several years ago I believed that a man had not received justice from the church.

It was a hard case, because he had done his share of foolish things,
but I could not see how he deserved the judgment against him.

So I spoke up.

I am glad to say that the General Assembly listened,
and the result was reconciliation.

Apparently I’ve done sort of thing enough that I’ve developed a reputation in the OPC.
Two different ministers have told me that they see me as a defender of the little guy.

How do your friends see you?

Are you a defender of the little guy?

Do you look out for the helpless?

Second, love kindness.

The word translated “kindness” is *hesed*,
which can be translated kindness, mercy, steadfast love, covenant faithfulness.
The King James invented the word “lovingkindness” in order to try to capture the sense.

Hesed is what is shown by the powerful to the helpless.
In that sense, it is very close to the idea of *justice*.
The difference is that *justice* focuses on the action –
to *do* justice.

Hesed focuses on the attitude or disposition.
The one who shows *hesed* intervenes to rescue the weaker party
not out of “obligation” –
but out of mercy/grace/kindness.

God has loved *hesed* in his steadfast love to us when we were weak.
Therefore *we* are to love *hesed* in how we treat those who are weak as well.

Doing justice and loving kindness are closely related – and both focus on our horizontal relations
with others around us.

The third point is a little different:

“walk humbly with your God.”

This focuses on our vertical relationship with God.
As Jesus and Paul and John all do in their summaries of what God requires,
Micah emphasizes both the vertical and the horizontal.

As mentioned earlier, the word translated “humbly” probably means “wisely.”
To walk *wisely* (or prudently) with God
means to listen to God (certainly),
to obey God,
but also to draw near to God.

After all, if God has redeemed his people from slavery,
if we are remembering God’s faithfulness (his *hesed*)
so that we might know the saving acts of the LORD,
and if remembering is participation – if knowing is loving –
then walking wisely with God
means to *walk with God* in a manner that reflects God’s justice and mercy.

And God’s justice and *hesed* are illustrated in verse 9-16.

If you want to know what it means to “walk wisely” –
then look at how God shows justice and *hesed*.

3. Walking Humbly: The LORD’s Judgment against Israel (6:9-16) **a. Economic Sins Cannot Be Ignored (v9-12)**

⁹ *The voice of the LORD cries to the city—
and it is sound wisdom to fear your name:
“Hear of the rod and of him who appointed it!”^[e]*
¹⁰ *Can I forget any longer the treasures^[d] of wickedness in the house of the wicked,
and the scant measure that is accursed?*
¹¹ *Shall I acquit the man with wicked scales
and with a bag of deceitful weights?*
¹² *Your^[e] rich men are full of violence;
your inhabitants speak lies,
and their tongue is deceitful in their mouth.*

The voice of Yahweh cries out – and all the wise will hear and fear his name.
 God says that he will judge the economic sins of Israel.

God names several practices:

“the scant measure” and the “bag of deceitful weights.”

In those days there were no electronic scales.

Merchants would have a set of stones to use as “weights.”

The deceitful merchant would use one set for buying,
and another for selling,

so that his customers would be defrauded.

Modern technology makes this particular sin easier to detect –
but Micah’s point still applies:

if you make money by defrauding others,
then you are “full of violence.”

Jerusalem’s judges (and by implication, Jerusalem’s king) have tolerated unjust practices.
It is not enough to say, “it’s legal” –

neither is it enough to say, “let the market decide”!

Laws may be unjust.

The “market” may be unfair.

A God who does justice and loves *hesed*
will not tolerate a city that defrauds the innocent.

In verse 12 God indicts especially the rich.

The word “wealth” can be used positively.

The word “rich” is very rarely used positively!

The “rich” are the chief instruments of violence in the Proverbs and the prophets.

Those who have wealth ought to use it in the service of others –
not merely for their own selfish pleasure.

In a city or a nation characterized by *hesed*, there will be no super-rich, or super-poor.

Why do I say that?

Because if you use your wealth in the service of others,
then you won’t accumulate it very fast.

If you use fair weights and charge fair prices,
then you will not take advantage of your neighbor –
but you will love him as yourself,
and you will seek his economic good as much as your own (or more).

b. Therefore Economic Judgment Will Follow (v13-15)

¹³ *Therefore I strike you with a grievous blow,
making you desolate because of your sins.*

¹⁴ *You shall eat, but not be satisfied,
and there shall be hunger within you;
you shall put away, but not preserve,
and what you preserve I will give to the sword.*

¹⁵ *You shall sow, but not reap;
you shall tread olives, but not anoint yourselves with oil;
you shall tread grapes, but not drink wine.*

In verses 13-15, then, God says that he will bring justice upon Jerusalem.
Their economic sins will bring economic woes upon their own heads.

When verse 14 says “you shall eat, but not be satisfied, and there shall be hunger within you,”
several have suggested that it should be translated, “there shall be dysentery within you.”
(several of the rabbis took it that way – and the Arabic cognate means “to defecate”)

It makes sense of the image:

when you have dysentery, you can eat all you like,
but you are never satisfied because it “runs” through you too quickly.

Likewise, the following line may mean “you shall bring [to birth] but not deliver,
and what you deliver I will give to the sword.”

The image is likely that miscarriage that will afflict Jerusalem –
and those who do not miscarry will see their children destroyed by the sword.
[After all, the sword destroys *people*, not crops]

And verse 15 goes after the three staple crops of Israel:
the grain, the oil, and the wine.

Jerusalem has failed in the basics:

they have not done justice, loved kindness, or walked wisely with God.

Therefore, they will be judged in the basics:

the grain, the wine, and the oil.

c. Because You Have Walked in the Way of Omri and Ahab (v16)

¹⁶ *For you have kept the statutes of Omri,^[f]
and all the works of the house of Ahab;
and you have walked in their counsels,
that I may make you a desolation, and your^[g] inhabitants a hissing;
so you shall bear the scorn of my people.”*

And the reason for all this?

It goes back to remembering your history –
remembering the *story* of God’s dealings with his people.

God brings this judgment upon Jerusalem

“because you have kept the statutes of Omri, and all the works of the house of Ahab;
and you have walked in their counsels.”

In the book of Kings, there are three basic stories –

the story of Solomon and his temple in Jerusalem,
the story of Jeroboam and his golden calves in Bethel and Dan,
and the story of Ahab and his temple of Baal in Samaria.

The stories are completed in reverse order:

Ahab’s temple of Baal is destroyed by Jehu –
ending the line of Omri.

Jeroboam’s northern kingdom of Israel is destroyed by Sennacherib –
and Joash destroys the altar at Bethel.

And then Solomon’s temple is destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar –
and the house of David is laid waste.

But David’s house is compromised by the seed of Ahab.

Here, Micah says that Jerusalem has become like Samaria.

We know that Hezekiah father, Ahaz, established idolatrous worship in Jerusalem.

And so God says to Jerusalem:

You have not walked humbly/wisely with your God.

You have walked in the counsel of the wicked

(the word for counsel here is related to the word used of Balak in verse 5).

And so God’s repeated warning to his people is that so long as they pursue this course,
his repeated answer to their inquiries will be in the words of Edgar Allan Poe:

“Quoth the Raven: ‘Nevermore.’”

Indeed, the opening of Micah 7 (which we’ll sing in a minute)

demonstrates the same futility that Poe expressed in his famous poem.

But there is one glimmer of hope in chapter 6.

God still calls them “my people”!

Jerusalem will bear the scorn of “my people” –

which means that in spite of the desolation that will come upon the earthly city,
there is still hope for God’s people –

a hope found in the heavenly city which Christ established.

Tony Bennett may have left his heart in San Francisco,

but our hearts must be drawn to the heavenly Jerusalem –

the city whose glorious light needs no “golden sun,”

because the Lamb is its light!