



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Micah 1:1-9

“Samaria's Incurable Wounds”

TRANSCRIPT

[Prayer] Father, we thank Thee again for Thy word and we particularly praise Thee for the privilege that we have of opening it and studying it together. We thank Thee for the Old Testament and also the New Testament and we thank Thee for the concerns of the prophets as well as the concerns of the apostles. And we thank Thee, Lord, because we know that they represent the concerns that Thou dost have for us. And we know that those things that were written in the Old Testament were written for our learning and admonition upon whom the ends of the ages have come. May we profit from the study of them and Lord, give us diligence in the reading and pondering of Thy word. May the Holy Spirit be our teacher tonight as we turn to the study of the Scriptures now. For Jesus' sake. Amen.

[Message] We are turning tonight in our Bible study to the first of a series of studies through the prophecy of Micah. And so will you turn in the Old Testament to the Book of Micah? Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah. So if you're at Jonah, you're warm. The subject for tonight as we look at the first 9 verses is "Samaria's Incurable Wounds." Will you listen now as I read the first 9 verses of the prophecy of Micah?

I may appear to be a little uncertain tonight because during the week I was studying from another version, but tonight I am reading from the New International Version. And I think, just for the sake of simplicity I will go ahead and use this version as we go through the Book of Micah, but I was, to be honest with you, studying out of another version during the preparation. So if I am unable to find some word that I think is there, it's probably because I'm reading a different translation. Let's begin reading at the 1st verse. Micah writes:

"The word of the LORD given to Micah of Moresheth during the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah—the vision he saw concerning Samaria and Jerusalem. Hear, O peoples, all of you, listen, O earth and all who are in it, that the Sovereign LORD may witness against you, the Lord from his holy temple. Look! The LORD is coming from his dwelling place; he comes down and treads the high places of the earth. The mountains melt beneath him and the valleys split apart, like wax before the fire, like water rushing down a slope. All this is because of Jacob's transgression, because of the sins of the house of Israel. What is Jacob's transgression? Is it not Samaria? What is Judah's high place? Is it not Jerusalem?"

That rendering there, "What is Judah's high place? Is it not Jerusalem?" is not strictly speaking a literal rendering of the Hebrew at this point. It's something like, Who are the high places of Judah? But it is possible that in this instance the Hebrew text of the Masoretes is not accurate. And it's possible that a scribe, since it's possible that the word was not "What is Judah's high place?" but "What is Judah's sin?" – someone wrote in the margin of one of the early manuscripts "the high places." And thus the high places, the places where false worship was carried out, as the manuscripts were copied again were found in some of the manuscripts, some scribe thinking that a scribe before him had said the text really reads "high places" here instead of "sin." And so it's possible that this

should read: "What is Jacob's transgression? Is it not Samaria? What is Judah's sin? Is it not Jerusalem?" But her sin of course was the sin of putting up the high places, the places of worship of the false god Baal. Verse 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. All her idols will be broken to pieces; all her temple gifts will be burned with fire; I will destroy all her images. Since she gathered her gifts from the wages of prostitutes, as the wages of prostitutes they will again be used. Because of this I will weep and wail; I will go about barefoot and naked. I will howl like a jackal and moan like an owl. For her wound is incurable; it has come to Judah. It has reached the very gate of my people, even to Jerusalem itself."

"Samaria's Incurable Wounds." Micah is one of the minor prophets, as you know. But Micah is one of the minor prophets largely overshadowed by some contemporaries, overshadowed by Amos, whose vivid prophecy we have studied here in Believers Chapel. He is overshadowed probably by Hosea and particularly by the greatest of his contemporaries, the great prophet Isaiah. And nevertheless, Micah was a passionate, fearless witness to the truth.

Today I got a letter from a young preacher in Florida who's been listening to the radio ministry that Believers Chapel has down there. And he first of all wrote me a note or called me on the phone, and said that he was on the station too. I think I've made reference to this before. He said I'm on that station too, and I've been listening to you, and I want you to know that we're the only two on that entire Christian station that are preaching the sovereign grace of God. Well, he's put me on his mailing list and so I get all of his bulletins from his church. And his bulletins are very interesting because he has a lot of interesting quotations from various old Christians and authors, and I enjoy looking at them.

And today I received another letter from him in which there were two of his bulletins. And there was reference to James I, who once said of armor that it was an excellent invention for it not only saved the life of the person who was wearing it, but it also hindered him from doing harm to any one else. [Laughter] And then this individual who referred to that went on to say that it's very much like the excessive prudence which some professors pride themselves in. Not only do they escape all persecution by their excessive prudence, but they're never able to strike a blow, much less fight a battle for the Lord Jesus Christ. It is possible for preachers to be so prudent and so wise that they never do really say anything specifically that one might say, that's the word of God, and that brings me under some conviction.

Micah was not that kind of person. He was a person who was a fearless defender of the truth that came to him. Like all of the prophets of Israel, he was one who felt that it was more important to be obedient to the Lord God than it was to please the men to whom he was sent. Hezekiah's reformation was probably due to the preaching of Micah. That appears to be so when we read Jeremiah chapter 26, verse 18 and verse 19. So he is an important man in the history of the prophetic ministry to the nation Israel.

His name Micah which appears in the prophecy here is a shortened form of his real name which was Micaiah, or Micaiah. Micaiah means "Who is like Ya?" Or Micah: "Who is like Ya?" "Who is like Jehovah?" So the name itself is a kind of challenge for an individual who heard his name to compare him the true God with other gods.

His ministry was a ministry that lasted about sixty years. In the text that is before us here, reference is made to the "reigns of Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah." And Jotham came to the throne around seven hundred and forty-two to forty BC. And then Hezekiah ruled on in to about six-eighty-five BC. So about sixty years was the time of his ministry. And while he was himself from Judea, the little village of Moresheth was down to the southwest of the city of Jerusalem and in Judah; nevertheless his ministry was a ministry to both of the kingdoms, the northern kingdom and the southern kingdom. We'll just say

he preached from about seven hundred and forty-two BC to six hundred and eighty-seven BC or about fifty-five or so years.

The historical situation in which Micah found himself is interesting and important for the understanding of this prophecy. In the north, Jeroboam the second had managed to make it such that Israel was relatively safe from outside invaders. Assyria had been troubled with some internal problems and the result was that he had succeeded in giving them a measure of peace.

In the south, one of the greatest of Judah's kings was on the throne from seven hundred and sixty-seven to seven hundred and forty or so BC. His name was Aziah, also called Azariah, or the "strength of Jehovah."

Now Aziah was one of the most magnificent of all the Judean kings. He was a person who was a very strong military man, and as a result of the work that he did, Judah was relatively safe from the growing Assyrian threat. Later on Assyria did come down and during the reign of Ahaz in seven-twenty-two BC, Samaria fell. But Micah is a prophet who prophesied from the great days of Aziah and Jeroboam all the way down to and through the days of Hezekiah.

If one were to describe the times in which Micah ministered, perhaps there is no better description of it than the description that is given by a writer, one sentence. He said, "Morals were low."

Now we notice from verse 7 here, we read, "All her idols will be broken to pieces; all her temple gifts will be burned with fire; I will destroy all her images. Since she gathered her gifts from the wages of prostitutes, as the wages of prostitutes they will again be used." You can see from this that morals were not great at the time. The government was decadent.

And we read in chapter 3 and verse 9 these words: "Hear this, you leaders of the house of Jacob, you rulers of the house of Israel, who despise justice and distort all that is right." The writer goes on to say the courts were corrupt. And we read in verse 11 here

in chapter 3, "Her leaders judge for a bribe, her priests teach for a price, and her prophets tell fortunes for money. Yet they lean upon the LORD and say, 'Is not the LORD among us? No disaster will come upon us.'"

"Her leaders judge for a bribe." That almost sounds like modern times, doesn't it? One of the men who was appointed to the Supreme Court recently died and was unable to serve because of some conflicts of interest. And we've seen so much of that in our government and in our judiciary that one could say we're living in the same kind of days in which Micah prophesied. Our morals are low. The government is certainly a corrupt government in so many ways, and the courts are corrupt as well.

In addition, the religion which Israel was supposed to proclaim had now become only a formalistic kind of thing. In chapter 2 and verse 11 we read, "If a liar and deceiver comes and says, 'I will prophesy for you plenty of wine and beer,' he would be just the prophet for this people!" so Micah says.

In chapter 3, verse 11, Micah says, "Her leaders judge for a bribe, her priests teach for a price, and her prophets tell fortunes for money."

Now that too is characteristic of our day. In fact, there are many people who do not like to even preach if they do not, if they are not paid a certain amount of money. You would be amazed, for example, at how many evangelical preachers, if you were to ask them to come and minister to a church, will send you out a little letter in which they say, We will come for such and such a price. That is a very common thing. So when Micah says, "Her priests teach for a price, and her prophets tell fortunes for money," he's describing the same kind of situation that we have with us today.

That's one of the reasons I think that the elders have always felt that it was proper for us in Believers Chapel to have ministry in which we did not ask for money. And therefore you will not, as a general rule, find seminars in which we tell you: We're going to have a seminar on such and such; it will cost you twenty or thirty or forty dollars for

the weekend, or whatever it may be. You can see that in the days of the prophets that was regarded as something that was very corrupt.

The nation had lost its integrity and it is in the midst of this kind of situation that Micah prophesied. I cannot help but think of the crisis that we're all following with such interest down south in South America with Britain and Argentina. One wonders if it's possible for a nation today to really stand up for something. And I think when the Argentinians, you'll notice that my sympathies lie to the east of us rather than to the south, but when the Argentinians took the Falkland Islands and word went back to England, Mr. Pym said, Britain does not appease dictators. Now it's going to be interesting to see whether that is really true or not. I'm following that with a great deal of interest and in fact, if I were young, I'm afraid I'd want to take up arms, that's how I feel about it. But at any rate, we're living in days in which principles do not really mean too much to us any more. And what we've seen through the media is obviously a way by which we can get these two together and give them that particular place and everybody save a little bit of face.

There are two permanent values I think in the prophecy of Micah. And I'd like to mention them before we turn to verse 1 through verse 9 for the exposition. One of the things that Micah does that is very important is he unmasks false rulers. And I'd like to read verse 1 through verse 4 of chapter 3 in testimony to that permanent value of the prophecy of Micah.

"Then I said, "Listen, you leaders of Jacob, you rulers of the house of Israel. Should you not know justice, you who hate good and love evil; who tear the skin from my people and the flesh from her bones; who eat my people's flesh, strip off their skin and break their bones in pieces; who chop them up like meat for the pan, like flesh for the pot?" Then they will cry out to the LORD, but he will not answer them. At that time he will hide his face from them because of the evil that they have done."

So Micah is a prophecy in which there is an unmasking of the false rulers of his day.

The second permanent value of this prophecy is the fact that in Micah we have an unveiling of the true ruler who is to come. And until he comes, we will not have any satisfactory rule upon this earth. Listen to chapter 5, verse 2 through verse 4 which contains the very familiar prophecy that we all have heard many times.

"But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times. Therefore Israel will be abandoned until the time when she who is in labor gives birth and the rest of his brothers return to join the Israelites. He will stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God. And they will live securely, for then his greatness will reach to the ends of the earth. And he will be their peace."

Well, let's turn to the 1st first verse of chapter 1 and the 1st verse contains the introduction to the book. Micah is not an easy prophecy to outline. I know that we all like to have an outline and if I'd had time I would've put up a simple one, but really it is a very difficult book to outline. In fact, one of the most recent commentaries on the Book of Micah is a book in which the author comments that many have followed out a variety of structural trails in trying to find the structure of the prophecy of Micah. So it seems that it's probably best for us not to set out an outline as if it's an authoritative kind of outline.

Luther said this about the minor prophets, or about the prophets as a whole; I'm sure he must have had Micah partially in mind when he said it. But he said about the prophets, "They have a queer way of talking like people who instead of proceeding in an

orderly manner ramble off from one thing to the next so that you cannot make head or tail of them or see what they're getting at."

Now that's one of the reasons that we can enter in to Luther's feelings because he really is telling us exactly how we often feel when we read the prophets. Now some of you are looking at me very sternly and solemnly as if when you read the prophets it's all very plain and clear. But I know that it's not so because too many have testified otherwise. I like Luther's comment. I think he's right. These people do have a queer way of talking until you get used what they are trying to do.

I think also it is necessary to study them much more intensively than we're willing to give to it as a rule. And that's probably the reason we find them very difficult. I'm going to suggest to you just a simple little outline. And I'd like for you to notice the word that begins verse 2, "Hear, O peoples, all of you." And that message that is set out there consumes the first 2 chapters. And then in chapter 3, verse 1 we read, "Then I said, "Listen, you leaders of Jacob." And that message is a collection of Micah's utterances that take us through the 5th chapter. And then in the 6th chapter, we have: "Listen to what the LORD says."

Now if you have an Authorized Version, you'll notice that in all three of those places we have the little word "hear". So the first section of the book contains the first two chapters. The third, fourth and fifth chapters contain the second division. And then the sixth and seventh chapters contain the third division of the book. Each of which begins with that little word "hear." And that's probably as easy a way to think of the Book of Micah as one can find. It's not a perfect outline of the book and so if you find some difficulty later on well I'm sure you'll at least remember that it's not easy to find the outline.

Now let's begin with verse 1 and I notice that the first thing that Micah speaks about is the source of his messages. He says, "The word of the LORD given to Micah of Moresheth during the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah."

Now notice he says "The word of the Lord," so that stresses the divine origin of the messages that he gives. But it is given to Micah of Moresheth and that stresses of course the human agent in the unfolding of the word of God. In the New Testament we often read in books like, for example, Matthew, "Then that spoken by the Lord through the prophet was fulfilled." Notice that statement. "Then that spoken by the Lord through the prophet." So in those statements the author of Scripture is said to be the Lord. The person through whom the word of the Lord comes is the human individual. "That spoken by the Lord through the prophet Isaiah" or "through Jeremiah might be fulfilled." That same pattern is here. It is the word of the Lord, but it is "given to Micah of Moresheth during the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah." So we have here is these words the twofold aspect of the inspiration of the Scriptures. The Scriptures were written by God. That's why we so often read, "Thus saith the Lord."

You don't usually read, Thus saith the Lord and his prophet. Of course, you could read that. But the great stress of the Bible rests upon the divine source, the divine origin of the word. "Thus saith the Lord." It is the word of God. But it does come to us through a human instrument. In this case it's the word of the Lord but it comes through Micah of Moresheth.

Now the method of the divine revelation is suggested in the end of the verse. He says, "The vision that he saw concerning Samaria and Jerusalem." Now if you'll look up the Hebrew word translated saw here, the Hebrew verb *kbä·zä'*, that word is said to mean to see. Sometimes it really means to see something physically. At other times it means to see as a prophet would see in an ecstatic state. And almost all of the commentators and students of the prophets feel that when a prophet writes this, "the vision that he saw concerning Samaria and Jerusalem," he's referring to the ecstatic state, the prophetic state in which he was when the word of God came to him. It was something he saw. In other words God passed before him the messages that he was to give to the people to whom he was sent, the people of Israel and the people of Judah. This was divine prophetic

revelation. That's characteristic of a prophet. A prophet is a person who is given revelation by God. Not illumination preeminently but revelation, the unfolding of truth.

Now that truth may be predictive truth or it may be moral truth. It may be words of exhortation, but it is something that is unfolded to the prophet. It's not teaching in the sense that a person is illuminated by the Spirit to understand something already written. But it is revelation. It is the thing that is given directly by the Lord to the prophet and becomes the word of God, that is, the written word of God.

Now we do not have any prophets today. We have lots of people who claim to be prophets. But we don't have any prophets today. No one is giving us revelation. Many people are giving us expositions of the word of God, some very good, some not so good, some horrible. Those are attempts to explain the word of God. But the prophets gave revelation. They had things that were new to unfold to us. We do not have such men as that today. All one has to do is to listen to the so-called prophecies and it becomes evident very soon that they are not edifying at all. In fact, they're usually silly.

Now he says, "The vision that he saw." He was in this ecstatic state and I must confess to you I haven't got the slightest idea of what it feels like to be in a prophetic state except when I predict Cowboy games. Then suddenly I come into that state and as you know, you know the fateful consequences of trying to follow such a thing as my prophecies concerning the Cowboys. That's as close as I come to the prophetic state. I really have no idea what feeling the prophets had when they were in this state.

Now they tell us something about it. They tell us how they were caught away, the things that they saw. But as far as experiencing it is concerned, so far as I know, there is no one today who has ever experienced any of this. And whenever you read about it in the paper, you can be sure that it is not true.

Now the scope of the messages is described by Micah as being "concerning Samaria and Jerusalem." Now these were the two cities that were important in the two peoples. Samaria was the capital of Israel, the northern kingdom. Jerusalem was the

capital of Judah, the southern kingdom. This of course transpired as prophecy was given after the division of Israel into the two kingdoms, the northern and the southern kingdoms.

The indictment of the people follows in verses 2 through 9. And this oracle, by the way, is an oracle that antedates the fall of Samaria to the Assyrians in seven-twenty-two BC. Micah doesn't tell us exactly when he was given this message but we know it was before that time because Samaria is not yet under the authority of the Assyrians.

If you study carefully these verses, verse 2 through verse 9, you notice that there are two eight-line stanzas. Verse 2 through verse 5 is the first. And then verse 6 through 9 is the second. And as one of the commentators says, the punch word, the word that really would bring his hearers up is the word Jerusalem which occurs at the end of verse 5. "What is Judah's high place? Is it not Jerusalem?"

And then when you turn to verse 9, there it appears again. "It has reached the very gate of my people, even to Jerusalem itself." So the two stanzas or each one of them lead up to the indictment of Samaria and the fact that this indictment is reaching right now to Jerusalem.

There is also another hinge in this prophecy in this particular section of it and it is seen in the little word "this" which occurs in verse 5 and then again at verse 8. Notice in verse 5, "All this is because of Jacob's transgression." He's giving the reason for what he's said before. "All this," so it looks backward. And then in verse 8 we read, "Because of this." And again the little word "this" looks backward. "Because of this I will weep and wail; I will go about barefoot and naked."

So here we have two stanzas and these two stanzas are stanzas in which the people are indicted by the Lord God through the prophet. The first of the stanzas which begins in verse 2 and concludes in verse 5 is a universal call by Micah to judgment. And let's notice the content of it. We read in verse 2,

"Hear, O peoples, all of you, listen, O earth and all who are in it, that the Sovereign LORD may witness against you, the Lord from his holy temple. Look! The LORD is coming down from his dwelling place; he comes down and treads the high places of the earth. The mountains melt beneath him and the valleys split apart, like wax before the fire, like water rushing down a slope."

Now what is he talking about? Well, he's saying that God, he's picturing for us a court scene and God is the witness for the prosecution. And the incriminating evidence is evidence against the peoples of the world.

Now as you read on, it's evident that he's thinking about Samaria and he's thinking about Judah. But evidence against Samaria and evidence against Judah is evidence against the whole world because, after all, if the people of God are to be judged, how much more the people that are not the people of God. So he's the witness. He's the plaintiff. He also is the judge. And every judgment is an earnest of the final judgment, so he calls all of the peoples of the earth to reflect upon what he is doing with his people in order that they too might respond to the fact of his judgment.

And the picture that Micah gives us of the judgment of God is of a giant individual who comes down from his celestial residence, and the first thing that he puts his feet upon are the mountains of the earth. Someone has said, it's like some Everest conqueror who's coming down in order to carry out judgment. Look at that marvelously figurative picture that he gives in verse 3. "Look the LORD is coming down from his dwelling place." He's talking about heaven. "He comes down and he treads the high places of the earth. The mountains melt beneath him." Because of course he's coming in the fire of judgment. And because he's coming in the fire of judgment, the fire is so intense and so hot with the presence of the living judge of the earth, that everything melts in his presence. So he comes from his celestial residence and all nature is cringing and crumbling at his coming. What a magnificent picture of the coming of the Lord God. It is

figurative, of course. And he pictures him in this way because he's speaking of divine judgment.

Now if you have no concept of what it means for God to judge, this surely should be a very solemnizing kind of thing to realize that it is before this great God that even the people of God shall one day appear. The Scriptures say that we shall one day appear before the judgment seat of Jesus Christ. And if you're not in Jesus Christ then of course you shall stand before this great God who is pictured here as judge, as witness, as plaintiff, to carry out his sovereign will.

Now why is this so? Why is he coming like this? Why is coming in this fearful way? Why Micah says in the 5th verse, "All this is because of Jacob's transgression, because of the sins of the house of Israel. What is Jacob's transgression? Is it not Samaria? What is Judah's high place? Is it not Jerusalem?"

Now if an Israelite were to hear Micah and the opening of his message and Micah were to say, "Hear, all peoples, all of you, listen, O earth and all who are in it," you can just picture the Israelite standing over by the side of the crowd saying, He's going to really give a judgment message against the Gentiles. He's going to talk about those who do not know our God Yahweh. So you can see in the first part of it, they might be very content to listen to what he has to say but make the application to someone else. So he asks: Who are these enemies? Why this great show of force? God coming down out of his celestial residence and walking upon the mountains in divine judgment. Well as they are asking this question, there is suddenly a dramatic turning of the nation's tables. And who stands first before the tribunal of the Lord God? Why, it's the people of God who stand first before his tribunal.

"All this is because of Jacob's transgression," not the Gentiles, "Jacob's transgression, because of the sins of the house of Israel." What a devastating climax this is. Israelites thinking, Surely he is coming to judge the Gentiles, but no, it's not the Gentiles, it's the Jews. It reminds me of Peter's statement in 1 Peter, chapter 4 when he

says, "For it is time for judgment to begin with the family of God; and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God? And, 'If it is hard for the righteous to be saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?'"

Judgment does begin at the house of God. And the reason that judgment begins with the house of God is, well those who have the greatest opportunity also have the greatest of responsibility. So God's people, what a devastating climax, Judah and Jerusalem. And I think also, if you were a Judah-ite listening to this, "What is Jacob's transgression? Is it not Samaria?" he might still have felt, Well, he's not going to touch me. But he said, "What is Judah's high place?" or "What is Judah's sin? Is it not Jerusalem?"

Now it's striking to me also that as you look at this, to ask the question, Where does Micah locate the problem? Now I'm not going to say this in order to get you off the hook, but I think it's very interesting that he locates the problem in Samaria and Jerusalem.

Now Samaria was the city that was the capital of the northern kingdom. Jerusalem was the city that was the capital of the southern kingdom. So the problem is located in the capital cities. It's Samaria and it's Judah. Well, what a wonderful way to make an application. What's the problem in the United States? Well, the problem really is in Washington. It may not seem that way to you, but the greatest problem that we have as a country is what transpires in the headquarters of our country. Many people know that of course. And many people would say that. But the metropolis of Samaria and the metropolis of Jerusalem is the heart of the nations. And the pulse of the entire nation beats in its capital city. Now that's enough to scare any American to death to think that our destiny is affected by the people that are living in Washington. But it is so. It is really so.

One of the great problems that we have in the United States is the fact that Washington is our capital city and has become the kind of capital city that it has become.

Anybody, it seems to me, who studies the character of the city of Washington knows that the United States is in difficulty.

Now let's think about Micah's day. You see, Israel and Judah were theocratic countries. Israel was a theocratic nation. It was a nation that was wedded to a particular religion, the religion of divine revelation set forth in the Scriptures. We're not really that kind of nation, of course, we are different. But for them this was the nation in which Yahweh was supposed to be worshiped. But what has happened? Well, the nation has apostatized in so many ways. The spiritual things that were done, were done simply in a formalistic way. There was positive sin. The poor were taken advantage of. People were getting richer and richer and the poor were having more and more difficulties. These are some of the characteristics of our nation as well. And they are particularly characteristic of the nations to the south of us which as a rule are ruled by a few families, relatively speaking, who have authority in their hands. The result is that the people suffer, and of course, we see all of the manifestations of it in the turmoil in Central and South America today.

But you know if we look at the church of Jesus Christ, we see some of these same things in the church of Jesus Christ. Let's think of the church as a theocratic people for that's what we are. Those who profess the name of the triune God form, in a sense, and I say only in a sense, a group of people that are like Israel. As you know it's very common for people to speak of the church as the "new Israel". I don't really think that's too good because the term Israel is never used of the church. But the figures that are used to describe Israel in the Old Testament are figures that are used to describe the church today.

In 1 Peter chapter 2, verse 9 and verse 10, the apostle writes words like this, he says, "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light."

Now all of those expressions were used of the nation Israel, "the chosen people, the royal priesthood, the holy nation, the people belonging to God." What is the condition of the church today? What's the condition of those who profess the name of the Lord Jesus Christ? Well, of course we are riddled by denominationalism and many of the denominations are true to the Bible. The great mass of them, I think, we would say are not so true to the Bible. We have many independent churches. Many of them are true to the Bible; many of them are not true to the Bible. We have a situation in which there is a great deal of truth mingled with a great deal of error. One thing that characterizes part of the church of Jesus Christ is a plain apostasy from the truth of the word of God.

If, for example, you went in to our theological seminaries where the word of God is taught by men who have been trained in theology and in other disciplines, you will find that characteristic of them is some departure from the word of God. Eliminating a relatively few evangelical seminaries, thirty or forty of them, many of those that are not evangelical are characterized by rank apostasy. Many of them teach things that a simple reader of the Bible would immediately sense was not true to Scripture.

One of the greatest of the influences today is found in process theology which has become very popular in our theological institutions. It stands somewhat in between the old irrationalism of a generation ago and orthodoxy, orthodoxy being the right wing and irrationalism being the left, characteristic of men like Kierkegaard and Bard and Bruner and some of the Neo-orthodox men. And process theology, in process theology men are rethinking. This is actually a kind of theology that has been influenced by a particular type of philosophy: the philosophy of Charles Hartshorne who's taught at the University of Texas, of Whitehead and of many others.

This kind of philosophy theology is a philosophy theology that teaches or at least thinks that God is, thinks shall I say, not so much thinks but wrestles with the question of whether God might not be a relative being. And therefore we cannot really speak of God

as an immutable God but a God who changes in order to deal with many of the modern problems that face us. And so in ethics what we have is a kind of ethics that is suitable for a particular age. Since God himself is a relative God, theology is surrelative to use one of their favorite terms, surrelative, and therefore God himself is mutable, not immutable. And ethical principles change with the culture and the times in which we live.

Now that, I'm sure, if Micah were here, he would have some very, very good words to say about that. We are the prey of all kinds of false teaching. If it is not the Moonies, it's Rajnish. Some of you've been reading in the, or listening to the TV and seeing on the TV Rajnish and his followers, a kind of viewpoint that is very reminiscent of Buddhism, but nevertheless is different. This Indian has managed to gain a number of adherents, several thousand already in the United States. The other night on one of the night programs, reference was made to the fact that they are seeking to buy a little town in Oregon and make it their town.

It's so surprising that people would follow this kind of thing as if it were a theology. It's a combination of Buddhism and American do-as-you-please-ism and that kind of thing. But we go for it. Even in evangelicalism, there are kinds of things that are really things that certainly bring reproach upon the name of Christ. I guess some of you've just read in *Christianity Today* of the suits that are now being filed against Bill Gothard because of immoralities that have existed within his own organization. This kind of thing is a reproach to evangelical Christianity. I'm sure that Micah would have had a great deal to say about things like that.

Well, he says, "All this is because of Jacob's transgression, because of the sins of the house of Israel." And you know this is a rather solemn thing to think that this was something that God the sovereign Lord lodged against his own people. And we are no different. We who make profession of faith, who make profession that we follow the Scriptures, we have a responsibility to be subject to the word of God.

Now the second stanza gives the special content of the judgment and the prophet describes it in verse 6 and verse 7 and then he describes his reaction to it in verse 8 and verse 9. Reading verse 6 and verse 7:

"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. All her idols will be broken to pieces; all her temple gifts will be burned with fire; I will destroy all her images. Since she gathered her gifts from the wages of prostitutes, as the wages of prostitutes they will again be used."

This magnificent city of Samaria had a cancer in its midst and so God is going to cut it out. And what's going to happen to Samaria? Well, it's going to be nothing but a ruin tell, that's all. I'm going to "make Samaria a heap of rubble."

When you read about the works of the archeologists and you look at what they're doing, they will describe the tells. It's just a mound of stones and dirt, and that's where some ancient city was, a living vivid testimony to the truthfulness of the word of God.

This magnificent urban city is going to be a place where grape vines are planted. That was a fruitful part of the land and he says "I will make Samaria a heap of rubble, a place for planting vineyards." And so the urban city, the beautiful urban city is going to be nothing more than a place for the vineyards.

And all of the religious paraphernalia is fit only for devastation. All of the things that they managed to gain by virtue of the money that was paid to the temple in order that the individuals might have illicit intercourse with the prostitutes attached to the temple to represent Jehovah as one of the fertility gods like Baal, the wickedness of it is enough to turn one's stomach. God's says all of those things that they gained by the wages of prostitution, well, he's going to bring in the Assyrians. They're going to destroy the city. The Assyrians are going to come in and the others are going to come in.

They're going to rip out the gold and the silver and take it, and like soldiers do, use that to pay for further prostitution. So the things that you did in the name of Jehovah, making him just like Baal (One only has to read of Ahab and Ahaz and others to see what he's talking about.), those very things are going to be done to you.

And then Micah gives us his reaction. "Because of this," he says in verse 8, "I will weep and wail; I will go about barefoot and naked. I will howl like a jackal and moan like an owl (or an ostrich). For her wound is incurable; it has come to Judah. It has reached the very gate of my people, even to Jerusalem itself."

In the Hebrew text, these are in what are called prophetic perfect stems. In other words, he writes as if it's already come to pass, but nevertheless he's referring to the future. So he describes his cries as banshee cries like the plaintive howl of a jackal or the gruesome screech of an ostrich to express the anguished sense of bereavement that has come to the prophet because of the things that have happened to his own people.

I confess I cannot help but think of the Apostle Paul who said, "I speak the truth in Christ, I'm not lying, my conscience confirming it in the Holy Spirit, I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, those of my own race." That feeling is the feeling of Micah. "Because of this I will weep and wail; I will go about barefoot and naked. I will howl like a jackal and moan like an owl."

Let me conclude by just noticing several important emerging truths here. I just mention only three of them. First of all, Yahweh is the universal Lord. He's the God who comes down out of heaven who when he puts his foot on the earth he puts it on the top of the mountains of the earth and "The mountains melt between him and the valleys split apart, like wax before the fire, like water rushing down a slope." He is the sovereign universal Lord, and because he is that, he is going to judge. The Apostle Paul in Romans 2 tells us how he's going to judge, and essentially Paul says he's going to judge according to reality. He's going to judge according to truth. He's going to judge according to

works. He's going to judge according to the things that we have done. So he will judge according to reality. That's the first truth.

The second is that Yahweh is the exclusive Lord of his people. It's clear that when he calls all of the nations to judgment it's with a view to judge, specifically speaking of the judgment of Israel and the judgment of Judah. In other words, the fact that Israel belonged to the Lord put them in the place of supreme responsibility.

Listen to what Amos says. Amos says, "You only have I chosen of all the families of the earth." Isn't that magnificent? The sovereign distinguishing grace of God. "You only have I chosen of all the families of the earth."

There are people who say, well, in the New Testament we have a lot about the choice of nations. But individual choice, well, that's something else. Well, I say the principle is the same. And it is clear that Israel is his chosen people. "You only have I chosen of all the families of the earth."

Now, what follows? "Therefore" we may sit back and do as we please. Therefore we need not ever worry about anything. We need have no sense of responsibility whatsoever. We are chosen. Anybody who argues like that does not understand the Bible, does not understand God, does not understand election.

He says, "You only have I chosen." That word is literally known. You only have I known, but known in the sense of choice. "Therefore I will punish you for all your sins." In other words, the choice place, the choice place of blessing brings with it human responsibility. Oh, the responsibility of the sovereign grace of God.

Now my dear friends in Believers Chapel, that pertains to us. We talk about the sovereign grace of God in choosing us. Therefore, he will deal first with us. Judgment begins at the house of God. How important it is that we who have this magnificent understanding of the truth that he's given to us properly represent him in holiness and righteousness.

And finally, the prophet: the concerned mediator. What a beautiful picture that is that Micah conjures up of himself going out because of the anguish and disturbance that he felt over the condition of Judah and the condition of Israel and going out and walking among the people as if he were barefoot, as if he were naked, picturing himself as a person who is in bereavement over a lost individual who was close to them.

Let me close by reading some words that Paul gave young Timothy. He said,

"In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing in his kingdom, I give you this charge: Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke, and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction. For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths. But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all your duties of your ministry."

May God help us as the people of God to be responsive properly to the truth that has come to us. Let's bow in a moment of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we thank Thee for this magnificent word from the prophet Micah. Who is a God like Yahweh? Oh Father, help us to remember Thou hast blessed us wonderfully and richly and therefore we have unusual responsibilities before Thee. Oh God, for every member and friend of Believers Chapel we pray that there may be an earnest seeking of Thy face, a desire to grow in the knowledge of the Scriptures and of the truth, responsiveness to the word of God and usefulness and fruitfulness in Christian living. Lord, if there are things that are out of accord with Thy word, by Thy grace enable

us to make confession, enable us to walk by the Spirit in the truth for the glory of Thy name. For Jesus' sake. Amen.