



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Micah 6:9-16

"Covenant, Guilt and Punishment"

TRANSCRIPT

[Prayer] Father, we again want to thank Thee and praise Thee for the privilege of the study of the Scriptures. We thank Thee for the way in which they point us to him whom to know is life eternal. And we thank Thee for the communion that we enjoy with Thee through the Lord Jesus Christ as he has set forth in Scriptures. We know that our Father takes pleasure in the Son, and we desire to take pleasure in him intelligently and with knowledge of the Scripture, so that we may enjoy the kind of fellowship with Thee that exists between the Father, and the Son, and the Spirit.

So Lord, tonight give us understanding of the word of God, enable us to rejoice in the things of Jesus Christ as Thou dost rejoice in them. Enable us also to take to heart the warnings and admonitions of the word of God. Deliver us from the kinds of errors and failures that characterized the nation Israel in the days of the prophets. We know it is only human to turn from Thee constantly. And so, Lord, by Thy grace enable us to cleave to Thee through the Scriptures, through the Holy Spirit, through the experiences of life. May they all drive us to Thee. We give Thee praise and thanks for the saving work of the Lord Jesus Christ and accept our thanks. In his name. Amen.

[Message] We're turning to Micah chapter 6, verse 9 through verse 16 for our study tonight. And the subject is "Covenant, Guilt and Punishment." What God requires has been described in verse 8, known among the theologians as "Jimmy's text." "He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" One notices from this particular text in the light of the Book of Micah that the thing that Micah inculcates with it is the harmony of theology and spirituality, or the harmony of ethics and piety.

The life of the tribe; verse 9, notice the statement, "Hear ye the rod." Now, later on we'll point out that that word translated "rod" is probably to be translated "tribe." And those of you that have the New American Standard Bible, you'll notice that verse 9 reads, "Hear, O tribe who has appointed its time." So the life of the tribe is full of opposites. Judah is characterized by wickedness. Judah is characterized by violence. Judah is characterized by cheating. She is characterized by deceit. And she is characterized by idolatry. Now, this is fertile ground for a prophet, of course, because the prophet seeks to bring Israel into harmony with the theology that has been given to them through Moses and the others who have written the word of God.

Now, since Judah has turned away from the Lord, and is in covenant with the Lord, then she must suffer the curses of the broken covenant. One reads, for example, in the Book of Deuteronomy, and later on if we have time we'll turn to some of those passages, Deuteronomy 28, Leviticus chapter 26, of things that have to do with the covenant that God made with the nation that had to do with their residency in the land of Palestine. Now, Judah was in covenant with Yahweh, and God set out curses that would become theirs if they disobeyed him and broke the covenant. Well, they have broken the covenant. They have breeched that covenant, and consequently the curses of the covenant are going to fall upon them.

You'll notice in this section that we're going to look at, there's the pattern of devastating in verse 13 through verse 16. Then as we begin chapter 7 we'll notice that

there is confession and repentance and this pattern must take place. The fundamental lesson of this paragraph, if one were looking for a fundamental lesson, would be simply the accountability of those who are bound to Yahweh, or to the Lord, by covenant. We are accountable. It's a great blessing to be part of the covenant that God has made with men. And while we are not part of the Palestinian covenant or the Mosaic covenant, we are, if we are believers in Jesus Christ, part of the New covenant. And the covenants of God have blessings that are bestowed by him, but they also cause us to be accountable to the reception of those blessings, and therefore if we are disobedient, we will suffer the curses that belong to the covenants.

It's an illustration, I think, of the truth of the Old Testament, and Numbers chapter 32, verse 23 in particular, when Moses writes, "Be sure your sin will find you out." And then in the New Testament in Galatians chapter 6, and verse 7, the Apostle Paul says something of the same thing. And speaking to people who are under the New covenant he says, verse 7 of Galatians 6, "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." Now, that was written by the apostle to believers. "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." Not what he thought that he had sowed, not what he wanted to sow, but actually what he sowed, that he will reap. So the fact that we are related to the Lord in a certain way means that we are accountable to him.

I think that there's a very great application of this passage to us today. The Christians of 1982 must heed the challenge of this passage. If he's a working member of a capitalistic system based on commerce, he must not be guilty of the kinds of sins that Israel was guilty of in the carrying on of their commercial and social activities. Now, that is by way of application. Now, we of course do not have the same precise covenantal relationship that Israel did. We don't live in a theocratic society, but those principles are applicable to us. A Christian businessman who operates his business in a crooked way,

or engages in deceit or fraud is going to have to handle the question of the accountability of him before the Lord God, just as Israel did in the Old Testament.

Well, with that in view, let's turn to the passage now. And I want to say right at the beginning that if you have a New American Standard Bible you'll be a little better off in this passage. But even if you have the New American Standard Bible, it's not absolutely certain that its translation is accurate, because this particular section in the Hebrew text is a bit difficult. And perhaps there are some problems in its transmission. So I'm going to try to stop every now and then and be sure that you understand the basis of one or two of the things that I will be talking about. But let's read first of all verse 9. I'm reading from the Authorized Version, and here in verse 9 the prophet gives an opening summons to judgment.

Verse 9, "The Lord's voice crieth unto the city, and the man of wisdom shall see thy name: hear ye the rod, and who hath appointed it." Now, apart from the correctness of that rendering, notice that there are three basic statements made in the verse. "The Lord's voice crieth unto the city," number one. "The man of wisdom shall see thy name," number two. "Hear ye the rod and who hath appointed it," number three. The first line is a kind of introductory line that calls attention to Yahweh's message. "The Lord's voice crieth unto the city." So first of all, notice the addressees of this message in this opening summons of judgment. It is addressed to the city. One might ask the question since the city is not named, what is the city? Well, most likely and almost all of the commentators agree on this point, the city is the city of Jerusalem. Micah was a prophet primarily to the southern kingdom, and Israel and Jerusalem of course was therefore the capital city. And when he writes, "The Lord's voice crieth unto the city" he has in mind the capital, the city of Jerusalem.

The second statement that is made is translated in the Authorized Version, "And the man of wisdom shall see thy name." Now the word translated "to see" is the common word for see in Hebrew. It also can mean to see in the sense of to give attention to. In

other words, mental seeing; physical seeing, I look out and see you physically. You are here tonight at 7:30 in Believers Chapel, and some of you are blond. Some of you are brunette. Some of you don't have any hair at all. I see different things when I look out. But I could also use the term see in a different sense. We often use it. You will tell me something and I will say, "Yes, I see that." Well, that means I understand it, I have come to see it and in the sense of mental perception, I understand. This word can mean "to give attention to," and thus it can be rendered "The man of wisdom shall see thy name," in the sense of give attention to Thy name, and thus fear thy name. But the word "to see" is very similar in Hebrew to the word "to fear." One is the word yare', the other is the word ra'ah. One is ra'ah, one is yare', but in a certain form they are very similar. Yare' and yar'ah. Now, it is likely, most of the Hebrew scholars feel that this is the verb "to fear."

And in Hebrew, let me explain this, so you won't think that there is anything unusual about this. In Hebrew the vowel points were not written for many centuries. The vowel points and the pronunciations of words were carried by tradition so that in the reading of the text one had only the consonants. And the vowels were supplied by the readers. Now, later on the Masoretes or some students of the Old Testament added vowels to them. But certain forms of the words look the same in the name consonants. And you can only know how they should be read, or how they were read traditionally, by the tradition. And so occasionally commentators have differed. The tradition after all, after many hundreds of years, the chances are some of the tradition was wrong. What we have in the Old Testament then is a text that may be understood in different ways depends on the practice of textual criticism. So in this case, since this word by its consonantal form might be given vowels to mean fear or vowels to mean see, we should look at the context and see what is probably more likely. And generally the majority of the commentators have felt that this text should read something like "The man of wisdom shall fear thy name."

So what the prophet then is saying is after he is saying that men ought to give attention to the Lord's message, and after he's addressed the city he says, "Men of wisdom will fear thy name." Now, of course, that's good sentiment. "Men of wisdom will fear the name of the Lord." So the "man of wisdom shall fear thy name." That's one of the great sentiments of the Old Testament, that we are to fear the name of the Lord. To fear the name of the Lord, of course, means to regard him and all of his perfections as the only true God, and therefore sovereign, just, merciful, and loving, holy, so that all of the aspects of the character of God are bound up in his name. Now, if we are sinners we should fear his name in the sense of fear his justice and the application of his holiness to us if we do not confess our sin in true repentance. If, of course, we are in relationship with the Lord that we should be in, then to fear his name is to honor him in those other aspects of his being. So to fear his name is something that the prophet speaks as something that is wise for us to do.

And then in the last sentence of verse 9 he says, "Hear ye the rod, and who hath appointed it." And this is notoriously difficult to translate, the New American Standard Bible has "Hear, O tribe," because again, the word for rod and the word for tribe are identical, "And who has appointed its time" is a possible rendering of the words "who hath appointed it." So let's take it as "Hear, O tribe, who has appointed it, or its time." One of the commentators has translated it, "Hear, O tribe, and assembly of the city that also is a possible rendering." So it's a reference to, since Judah is the tribe, it's a reference to Judah. "Hear, Judah, and all who are in the city," the assembly of the city. So let me go back over verse 9 and say that what the prophet does is to say first of all, that the Lord's voice cries in the city. He is addressing the city of Jerusalem. He says it is a wise thing, or "the man of wisdom will fear his name." So he should pay attention to what the Lord is going to say.

And finally, "Hear, O tribe, and assembly of the city, you," that is Judah, and you who make up the people who frequent the city, "you listen to what the prophet is going

to give as the words of God. So this is a message then for the city. It's a message then specifically for the tribe of Judah. And it's a message for all of the citizens of Jerusalem. All of those particularly, as the context will go on, who are making a dishonest shekel at the expense of country cousins who happen to come into the city and don't know how crooked and deceitful the businessmen of the city are. Prophets don't like for people to be fraudulent in business. They don't like for people to be deceitful. They don't respond at all to business men who cheat. And the prophet will go on and say something about this. And incidentally this was a theme of Hosea. It was a theme also of Amos. And you can find scatterings of this in all of the prophets. And you can find it specifically set out in the Law of Moses. So the prophet is doing nothing more than calling to mind the things that God said when he gave them the Law in the beginning. This is a passage, and the other passages are too, that should make crooked businessmen tremble.

Now, he says in verse 10, and in verse 11, and 12, he will lay out the indictment for their crimes. Let me read the verses. "Are there yet the treasures of wickedness in the house of the wicked, and the scant measure that is abominable? Shall I count them pure with the wicked balances, and with the bag of deceitful weights? For the rich men thereof are full of violence, and the inhabitants thereof have spoken lies, and their tongue is deceitful in their mouth." Now, this is directed primarily then against them who are enriching themselves by dishonest trade. For example, this is a passage that would apply to those individuals who sought to sell loans to the Penn Square Bank in Oklahoma City. Or it has reference, perhaps, to the Ambrosiano, and the bank in Vatican City. It also has something to do, perhaps, with continental Illinois, a well known and highly respected Bank of Chicago involved in some of those deals. It has to do with the First National Bank of Seattle, also involved in this. It probably has something to do with Lombard-Wall, and the recent failures of that particular organization, a couple of companies, I believe. It also has to do with Drysdale Government Securities. One only

has to read the *Wall Street Journal* to find illustrations of this every day. It is constantly going on, businessmen taking advantage of others.

This afternoon I was perusing *Barrons*. I like to see what the rich men read, you know, and so I read it and dream in the fantasy world. And there was an interesting story in the present *Barrons* about a particular individual who has been able to sell a gas well to several different people for millions. One particular person, I think from Tennessee, was taken in by him after he had already taken in somebody else for five or six million and was forced by the courts to give the money back. He went at it again and got another fish on the hook. And the result is they put out a company brochure, a beautiful company brochure about how their first well was this beautiful well with twenty-four million cubic feet, I believe, of gas flowing per minute, or however gas flows. And it actually was maybe one million or less. And even after when the person whom he had defrauded before called the chief executive officer of the company and said, "Look you're getting into difficulty. We were taken in by that fellow, and we won a court case, and we got our money back. And you'd better watch out." That fellow still went on and accepted the bait, and even now contends it must be a good well, because there is some gas in it. [Laughter] Well, there was more gas in the fellow who sold him than is probably in the well.

This is why we have consumer protection agencies. Now, of course, I don't mean to suggest that the consumer protections agencies are agencies that are funded and authorized by the triune God. But one of the reasons we have consumer protection agencies is because we have so many crooks around. And the crooks are often the consumers, too. It's the crooks trying to protect themselves from the other crooks.

But Micah, speaking for the Lord God, does not like that kind of thing, because the Bible has spoken specifically against it. Now, notice the divine disapproval of exploitation, in verse 10 and 11. "Are there yet the treasures of wickedness in the house of the wicked, and the scant measure that is abominable?" He's going to talk about

different ways that people cheat. "Shall I count them pure with the wicked balances, and with the bag of deceitful weights?" In other words, they had simple kinds of society then, but essentially the same kinds of operations were carried on then that are carried on today. And the Jewish people, in that day, and others, who did business there in Jerusalem, were guilty of dishonest measuring. When they bought things, why they would use a light measure, but when they sold things they would use a heavy measure. And by the process of finagling with their weights and measures, they were able to defraud people. In other words, they not only made money out of the trade, but they actually defrauded them by the use of false measuring. They had deceitful scales. "Shall I count them pure with the wicked balances, and with the bag of deceitful weights?" All of this putting your hand on the scales and various other ways in which people cheat their customers, those things were all thought of hundreds and hundreds of years ago. You know, we have an expression caveat emptor, "Let the buyer beware." And here is the illustration of the necessity of a statement like that.

I looked up, this afternoon, in our telephone book to see if we had something here in Dallas that might correspond to this. And sure enough, we have a Department of Weights and Measures. Now, what do you think that is, Department of Weights and Measures? Now I didn't have time to call up and find out what they did, but I have a hunch that they have a weights and measures inspector and he will go around to all of the meat markets and all of the other places where they have measurements, and he will test those measures. Of course, they will have them all ready for him, if possible, and then later on they may readjust them. But nevertheless the very fact that they have a Department of Weights and Measures shows that our society is basically susceptible to crookedness. And it's nothing new. It's endemic to human nature.

The God of the Bible is not Olympian god who sits on a mountain like Mount Olympus and does not really have anything to do with what we are doing down here on earth. One of the commentators said, "He's the Lord of the shopping center." I thought

that was a great expression, "the Lord of the shopping center." In other words, he is involved in even the least little dealings that we have with one another. And he does not like crookedness and deceit.

Now, the analysis of this indictment is given in verse 12. You notice it begins with a "for." "For the rich men thereof are full of violence." I like that because, or rather I was interested by this comment by Micah, "For the rich men thereof are full of violence," because he's been talking about commercial affairs, corruption in commerce. But he says, "For the rich men thereof are full of violence." So evidently what he is thinking is this, that dishonest itself is violence. We think of violence as a person who gets a gun in his hand and goes around shooting people. We have a lot of that in Texas, like I was saying Sunday, thirty-seven bodies in four days, I believe, or something like that. That's violence, but it also is violence when crookedness and deceit characterizes our society, because what takes place then? The law and order is breached, and one injures more than the economic situation when he is dishonest and cheating and fraudulent in his activities. There is a damage to the fabric of the whole society when that takes place. And therefore, anything that destroys law and order is violence in Micah's words. So "For the rich men thereof are full of violence, and the inhabitants thereof have spoken lies and their tongue is deceitful in their mouth."

Now having said this, having identified the problem, the prophet goes on to speak about the punishment that is to come. And verse 13 through verse 15 gives us the announcement of the punishment. "Therefore also will I," or as the New American Standard Bible has, "So also I." In other words, the divine action is fitted to the human breaking of the covenant. "Therefore also will I make thee sick in smiting thee, in making thee desolate because of thy sins. Thou shalt eat, but not be satisfied; and thy casting down shall be in the midst of thee." A reference, evidently to the giving birth to children, "and thou shalt take hold, but shalt not deliver; and that which thou deliverest will I give up to the sword. Thou shalt sow, but thou shalt not reap; thou shalt tread the olives, but

thou shalt not anoint thee with oil; and sweet wine, but shalt not drink wine." So the divine action then is fitted to the human breaking of the covenant. And desolation is to come because of the disobedience. And evidently in the light of the words that Micah uses, and in the light of the history, the desolation that God promised to them was the desolation of an invasion and a siege, a military invasion, and a military siege.

Now, the general content is given in verse 13, "Therefore also will I make thee sick in smiting thee, in making thee desolate because of thy sins." So the sins of the people who are in covenant with the Lord God are the basis for the devastation that follows. But then he speaks in detail in verses 14 and 15. And what these verses contain is a series of sentences that foretell frustration and failure in the basic activities of life. Now, let me go back just for a moment and remind you of something that is found in the Old Testament. Perhaps it would be good for us to turn back to the Book of Leviticus first. Then we'll look at a text in the Book of Deuteronomy. But Leviticus chapter 26, now remember when the Lord God gave Israel the Mosaic covenant he set out the covenant in the form of moral law, the Ten Commandments. He gave them civil laws; those laws govern their ordinary daily life. In them, incidentally, he spoke specifically in the Book of Leviticus, the Book of Deuteronomy about unjust weights and measures, fraudulent dealings one with another in every day business life.

And then the third aspect of the Law was the cultic aspect, the ceremonial, which is the priesthood and the offerings pointed forward to the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. So you have the moral law, the civil law, and the ceremonial law. Now, all of that makes up the Law. This division was a division that expositors have made as they studied those passages. It is not divided into the moral law, civil law, ceremonial law by God, as if to suggest, well one aspect of the Law you can break, and another you cannot, or you're under one part and you're not. You were either under the whole Law or you're not under the Law as a code. Well, in the Law certain things were set forth, but the relationship to the land was not covered specifically by the Law. It was set out in what has been called

the Palestinian covenant. And in the Palestinian covenant, given in Leviticus 26, and Deuteronomy 28 and 29 it was stated simply this, as long as Israel remained faithful to the covenant they would remain in the land. But when they became disobedient to the covenant, God would institute a series of disciplinary actions. Now, these disciplinary actions increased in degree. And finally, the final disciplinary action would be they would be scattered to the four corners of the earth.

Now, those degrees of discipline were degrees of discipline that God carried out. You can read them in Leviticus 26. You can read them in Deuteronomy 28 and 29, along in there. And the details are set in great detail. Now he set forth blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience. Listen, for example, to Leviticus chapter 26 and verse 26, Moses writes "And when I have broken the staff of your bread, ten women shall bake your bread in one oven, and they shall deliver you your bread again by weight: and ye shall eat, and not be satisfied." Now notice that "eat and not be satisfied," the same kind of thing that we have here in the prophet.

Turn to Deuteronomy 28, verse 30 and verse 31, Deuteronomy 28 and verse 30 and verse 31. Perhaps it might be good for us to go back a few verses and just note some of the things that are stated here in the very first verse of this chapter.

"And it shall come to pass, if thou shalt hearken diligently unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to observe and to do all his commandments which I command thee this day, that the LORD thy God will set thee on high above all nations of the earth: And all these blessings shall come on thee, and overtake thee, if thou shalt hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God."

He talks about the blessed things then for a number of verses. But then he goes on to talk about the curses, verse 15 for example. "But it shall come to pass, if thou wilt not hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to observe to do all his commandments

and his statutes which I command thee this day; that all these curses shall come upon thee, and overtake thee." Now he sets out the series of judgments that is to come. Verse 30 we read,

"Thou shalt betroth a wife, and another man shall lie with her: thou shalt build an house, and thou shalt not dwell therein: thou shalt plant a vineyard, and shalt not gather the grapes thereof. Thine ox shall be slain before thine eyes, and thou shalt not eat thereof: thine ass shall be violently taken away from before thy face, and shall not be restored to thee: thy sheep shall be given unto thine enemies, and thou shalt have none to rescue them."

Notice verse 38 through verse 40,

"Thou shalt carry much seed out into the field, and shalt gather but little in; for the locust shall consume it. Thou shalt plant vineyards, and dress them, but shalt neither drink of the wine, nor gather the grapes; for the worms shall eat them. Thou shalt have olive trees throughout all thy coasts, but thou shalt not anoint thyself with the oil; for thine olive shall cast his fruit."

So you can that a number of disciplinary actions were set out. You can go on and read that verse 64 for example,

"And the LORD shall scatter thee among all people, from the one end of the earth even unto the other; and there thou shalt serve other gods, which neither thou nor thy fathers have known, even wood and stone. And among these nations shalt thou find no ease, neither shall the sole of thy foot have rest: but the LORD shall give thee there a trembling

heart, and failing of eyes, and sorrow of mind: And thy life shall hang in doubt before thee; and thou shalt fear day and night, and shalt have none assurance of thy life,"

Now, these are the curses for disobedience. But that does not mean that Israel does not have title to the land anymore. At the end of chapter 26 of the Book of Leviticus after speaking of the judgment that are going to be poured out upon them, we read in verse 40 of Leviticus 26,

"If they shall confess their iniquity, and the iniquity of their fathers, with their trespass which they trespassed against me, and that also they have walked contrary unto me; And that I also have walked contrary unto them, and have brought them into the land of their enemies; if then their uncircumcised hearts be humbled, and they then accept of the punishment of their iniquity: Then will I remember my covenant with Jacob, and also my covenant with Isaac, and also my covenant with Abraham will I remember; and I will remember the land."

Now, let me sum up what we have here. Israel was given the land. They were told, however, that the land would be enjoyed by them only so long as they were obedient as a nation. Becoming disobedient they would make themselves liable to a series of judgments, chastisements would be a better term. The final one, of which would be, scattering to the four corners of the earth. Now, that took place when Israel was scattered to the four corners of the earth after the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus Christ. But God says through Moses that the enjoyment of the land is still open to them for their title is given in perpetuity. They have the land forever. The enjoyment of it depends upon their obedience. And so he says, "If they repent. If they confess, I will remember them, the covenant I made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and I will remember the land." It's very much like a father who may buy a car for his young child, who's not yet of legal age,

let's say sixteen. That might be a foolish thing to do, but nevertheless he's done it. And he gives the child the car and gives the title to it, but says, "Now you will not be able to use this car unless you are obedient. If you go out and race up and down the highways and get a lot tickets, I'm going to take the use of the car away from you, even though the title might be in your name." Well, the land is like that. The land is Israel's. Israel is the only nation in the world that has a proper title to a piece of land.

As a matter of fact, Israel is the only entity that has proper title to a particular piece of land, because it is divinely given by the judge of the universe. But they do not enjoy that land as God gave it to them until they're obedient. The Scriptures tell us in the last days he will pour out upon them the spirit of grace and supplications. They will, as a nation, believe and they shall be restored to their land and they will enjoy their land forever. The curses were covenantal curses. They were the curses that were made necessary, because they had been brought into the covenant by the Lord God.

Now, Micah is talking about that here when he says, you'll notice the parallel, the statements are very similar, "Thou shalt eat," verse 14, "and thy casting down shall be in the midst of thee; and thou shalt take hold, but shalt not deliver." Children will be born but difficulties shall take place. "That which thou deliverest will I give up to the sword but not be satisfied. Thou shalt sow, but thou shalt not reap; thou shalt tread the olives, but thou shalt not anoint thee with oil; and sweet wine, but shalt not drink wine." These are sentence that are frustrating. They are the kinds of things when they must feel when they as farmers grow a crop and then suddenly something comes and they are not able to realize anything from their crop. These are the curses related to the covenant which God made with Israel, which Israel hath broken. And that is why the nation has suffered down through the centuries.

Haggai writes about it, too, in the 1st chapter and the 6th verse of his prophecy when he says, "Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye eat, but ye have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe you, but there is none warm; and he

that earneth wages earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes." These are the divine chastisements upon the nation for their disobedient. The covenant being breached, the economy grinds to a halt. And that is what Micah is speaking about.

Verse 16 gives the concluding recapitulation. "For the statutes of Omri are kept, and all the works of the house of Ahab, and ye walk in their counsels; that I should make thee desolation and the inhabitants thereof an hissing; therefore ye shall bear the reproach of my people." In other words, here is the final damning concluding accusation, with ominous illusion to the cause of the northern kingdom's fate. The northern kingdom had gone into captivity because of its disobedience, because of its idolatry, because of its sickness and sin. And through Micah, God is warning the southern kingdom of the same thing, and using the terms that they would understand because they remembered Omri, the King of Israel, who was a wicked king. And they remembered the works of the house of Ahab.

Omri was the father of Ahab. And Ahab's wife, remember, was Jezebel, so we have here a kind of pattern of wickedness with Omri, and then with Ahab who married Jezebel who was a heathen, and through whom was brought into Israel the worship of Baal, false gods. I guess Ahab is best known for the Naboth incident, and it's very revealing, of course. Remember, I made reference to this the other day in one of the messages, maybe here, I've forgotten. But the statutes of Omri and the works of the house of Ahab are obviously derogatory terms. The statutes of Omri, wickedness, deceit, Ahab, idolatry, ruthless; remember, Ahab wanted Naboth's vineyard. He tried to deal with Naboth. Naboth said, "No, that's been given me by God. That's been given my family, I cannot sell it." And Ahab was used to trying to take things for himself, because he was the king. And since Naboth wouldn't do it, he came home, went in his bedroom, fell down on his bed, turned his face to the wall the Bible says, and moped.

And in came Jezebel. Now Jezebel, one thing you have to say about her, she was a wicked Margaret Thatcher. Now, Margaret Thatcher is a good Jezebel in the sense that

she is a definite character and a strong character. And Jezebel was a strong character. And she came in and she took a look at Ahab lying on the bed there and said, "That's what you get for eating your quiche." [Laughter] She said, "You're nothing but a wimp. [Laughter] You mean to tell me that Naboth is able to prevent you from having that vineyard. Who's king, Naboth or you?" And of course she arranged to get the vineyard. Well, the statutes of Omri and the works of Ahab were ruthlessness, idolatry, deceit, crookedness. That's what Micah means when he says, "For the statutes of Omri are kept, and all the works of the house of Ahab, and ye walk in their counsels." Apostasy to Baal, idolatry, ruthlessness, you know there are so many applications of this to modern day life, and modern life in the church that one could spend the rest of the week speaking about them.

Unitarianism in the Christian church, that is no better, it is of the same thing as the idolatry of the worship of Baal. Universalism, everybody is going to be saved ultimately. That is just as wicked as the statutes of Omri and the works of the house of Ahab. Our Methodist friends are having difficulty with homosexuality now. One can hardly read the Bible and not find numerous passages that deal with homosexuality. To say that other individuals have given different interpretations to those verses does not mean anything. Different interpretations of verses does not mean that the teaching thereby has changed. The correct interpretation is the important thing, not different interpretations. Different interpretations have been given of every word in the Bible, but they are ridiculous interpretations. Interpretations based upon the laws of interpretation are the correct interpretations, and anyone reading the Bible as the Bible has been read for thousands of years knows that God regards homosexuality as an abomination. He speaks specifically of it as an abomination, and yet here we have a professing Christian church actually entertaining the ordination of a homosexual. That is just as evil as the statutes of Omri and the works of the house of Ahab. It is unfortunate that in our Christianity society that we are so little read in the Scriptures that we can actually entertain something like that.

Now, I want you to notice two expressions that are, it seems to me, purposely contrasted by Micah. Will you notice the expression, "And you walk in their counsels." You of Judah, you in Israel, you are walking in the counsels of Omri and in the counsels of Ahab. Now, look at verse 8, Jimmy's text, "He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" What a difference, to walk humbly with thy God and to walk in the counsels of Omri and Ahab. There is all the difference in the world, for when one walks in the statutes of Omri and in the works of the house of Ahab, he is puffed up with his own importance. But when one walks humbly before the Lord God he walks with the sense of his own lack of acceptance in himself before the Lord God, and he walks with the constant sense of his own sin apart from the grace of God, and his own inability to do the things that are set out in Holy Spirit. To walk humbly is to walk in dependence upon the Lord, renouncing trust upon ourselves. To walk in the works of the house of Ahab and in the statutes of Omri is to walk in all of the things that God opposes in the Scripture.

Well, the outcome of the judgment that he announces is set forth in the last three clauses of verse 16. "That I should make thee a desolation and the inhabitants thereof a hissing: therefore ye shall bear the reproach of my people." The devastation that God is going to bring will provoke horror, because it's so bad. A hissing, in the sense that the other peoples about will look at Israel and say, "Look what has happened to them." The crowning indignity is the humiliation that follows. "And ye shall bear the reproach of my people." In those days the societies, because they were so closely related to theocratic ideas, felt that calamity and culpability were practically synonymous. In other words, when a great calamity happened, it was ordinarily taken as meaning that a divine judgment had taken place, because of the guilt of the people. Now, Job has a lot to say about that, and points out that that is not always true. But generally speaking, when great calamities took place, it was because of great culpability. The understood that God did

execute judgment and the histories of the nations of the human race is the history of divine providence in his actions among men.

Well he says, "Because of your disobedience, because you've broken the covenant, these are the things that are going to happen to you." The fundamental lesson is the lesson of accountability. Only two words need to be added, inevitable and imminent. Inevitable, we are inevitably accountable to the word of God. Whether believers or unbelievers, we are accountable to the word of God. Believers, in their own way, judgment begins at the house of God; unbelievers in their way too. We are all inevitably accountable, responsible. And that, so far as we know, is imminent. We do not know what the future holds.

Today *Time Magazine* came. A few days ago the featherweight boxing champion of the world, Salvador Sanchez, was driving his Porsche 928 on a road in Mexico. You perhaps saw it on the sports page. There was quite an article about it. He was driving at an excessively high rate of speed, sought to pass a truck, as I remember. There was another truck coming. The result was the car was demolished, and Sanchez, one of the finest of the professional boxers, had fought about forty-five times, had won forty three of them, lost one fight in his career and had one draw. He said, this was not in the article I read on the sports page but in *Time Magazine* today. He said, "I'd like to step down undefeated. I'm only twenty-three years old and I have all the time in the world." That's sad, isn't it? "I'm only twenty-three. I have all the time in the world." He had only a few days or weeks. We are accountable and we are inevitably accountable. And out accountability is imminent. I may not be here next Tuesday. You may not be here next Tuesday. In fact, we may not be here Sunday. We are accountable.

Micah's prophecy, it seems to me, is something that should speak very strongly to us as believers. It should speak to us as Christian businessmen, of course. It should also speak to us as Christians. And it should speak to all who are drawing breath. Let's bow in a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful to Thee for these wonderful words from the prophet. And we pray that Thou wilt enable us to respond to the accountability that we do have before Thee. There is not a single one of us who is not a sinner. O God, help us to recognize our sin, to confess our sin, to flee to the cross for forgiveness, and also to flee to Thee for the strength to cleave to Thee during the days of our life. We ask Thy blessing upon each one present. If there are some here who do not know the Lord Jesus Christ, may they flee to him who offered the atoning sacrifice for the forgiveness of their sins forever. For us who are Christians, we pray O God that we may remember that there is such a thing as divine chastisement, and that we are responsible to the word of God that has been given to us. Enable us to be obedient, responsive to the word of God, to constantly be growing in grace through the knowledge of the Lord Jesus and the work of the Spirit within. And Father, we pray that Thou wilt deliver us from...