

Dr. Elaine Phillips, Micah, Prophet Outside the Beltway, Session 7, Micah 6

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This is Dr. Elaine Phillips in her teaching on the book of Micah, Prophet Outside the Beltway. This is session 7, Micah 6.

We are moving into chapter six at this point, and probably of the sections of Micah that is most known, maybe I should say that are most known, chapter six verse eight is one of them.

Clearly, as Perry said last time, the prophecy about a ruler born in Bethlehem is very much there, but what does the Lord require of you is one of our significant passages. In order to work up to that, we really do need to review theological themes. I want to run through a couple of theological reminders because this particular chapter is chock full of things that are based on covenant.

Forgive me, but we need to do this. In the covenant relationship, it's the Lord and people that are in relationship. We're going to see more than once, we already have, my people, and that shows up in chapter six particularly.

We're going to see God's mighty acts and his prophetic word for his people. One of the things we talked about in chapter four was learning the ways of the Lord and the fact that included knowing what he has done for them and what he requires of them. Those things will be very significant as we step into chapter six.

Part of the covenant relationship is also being well aware that there are consequences as these people live within relationship. Blessings for obedience, chastisements or disobedience, we've certainly referred to those over and over again. They will come through again in chapter six.

At the beginning of chapter six, when the Lord, through Micah, calls them into a covenant dispute, generally speaking, heaven and earth are called as witnesses. There are going to be some interesting changes in that, if you want to call it a formula, as Micah addresses this and as the Lord addresses it as well. We'll see that.

Further theological reminder, just to kind of get it back on the table, is that the prophets were called to address broken covenant when the people had been disobedient. So, they bring charges. There's going to be a covenant dispute and chapter six is all about that.

We've already seen that the prophets warn about chastisements and they're measure for measure to the point that the Lord will respond in measure. But these

things alternate as well with promises of restoration. Those are the prophetic messages, not just Micah, but others as well.

A couple of things we also want to just get back on the radar screen in terms of the rhetoric that the Lord speaking through Micah will use because we're going to see it in chapter six. Probably the most prominent ones are understated allusions that presume knowledge of the historical and theological background. We're going to see this happen, especially as the Lord calls them to remember.

And that declaration to remember is very brief, but if you remember those fill-in-the-blank exams you used to have when you were in school, sometimes they asked you to remember a whole lot. And to all intents and purposes, Micah and the Lord together are asking the people to fill in the blanks in terms of what God has done with them. They're supposed to know this stuff.

In addition, as we've already seen in Micah, we're going to see it again. There are shifting speakers. That's going to be particularly interesting in verses seven and eight. We'll come back to how that works when we get there.

Nothing new here, but I just need to get it back on the table. Sometimes the Hebrew is challenging. I've tried my best to do a primarily literal translation at some points, and especially in verses nine and ten of chapter six, I will grind a little bit to a halt, but we'll do the best we can.

I need to get a quick review of our preceding chapters because the reason I'm doing this again is that as we move into chapter six with the call to the covenant dispute, it's based on everything that's been said before. The Lord has warned them, Micah's warned them, and so forth, and there have been these historic or prophetic vignettes, but we just need to have it all back on the radar screen. So, in chapter one, again, Samaria and Jerusalem are sinning, and we have our lament over our cities in Shephelah.

Chapter two, remembering that Torah has everything to do with not only how they approach God but how they deal with one another in terms of their living together and loving their neighbor as themselves. And so, chapter two is addressing terrible injustices, violence, and abuse, which are breaking the covenant in a major way. Chapter three continues it.

Leaders who ought to be directing their people towards proper behavior instead are instructing entirely the wrong way, and they do it for money, whether it's a prophetic statement of peace when there shouldn't be any, or something else. And so, chapter three ended with the destruction of the Lord's house. Chapter four, we saw the joy of many nations streaming up to Zion to learn and walk in the Lord's way.

And again, way is an important thing, and it refers to conduct and the transformations. We saw, however, that there is distress, and that distress actually continues in the chapter five, with the remnant and the struggling that they're going to endure. That's after our promise in verse two of the shepherd and the king.

And then there's judgment of cutting off all these things that are human, what should I say, ways of protecting themselves, whether it's walls, cities, fortresses, horses, chariots, or whether it's some kind of idolatrous allegiance that is going to be, of course, very precarious. With that in mind, here's an overview of chapter six. And I want to get this all out there so we can kind of see what the development is in this entire chapter before we atomize it into little segments.

So, there's a dispute. I've said already that we've been working towards this, but now there is a dispute, and the Lord is going to pose the charges, and he's going to call witnesses, and he's going to be the prosecutor, and they are the defendants. This is a serious thing that is now coming to its culmination.

As I said earlier, one of the things he does after he calls them to testify against him is he's going to say, remember, remember what I've done for you. And so there's a covenant history lesson. It's short, but my goodness, they are supposed to know all the interspaces or fill in the blanks as well.

Well, with the Lord's declaring that, then, you know, in a covenant dispute, presumably both sides have a say. And so, in verses six and seven, we have the people, the defendants, or one of them, a representative speaker, perhaps. But anyway, the questions are being asked: how are we to approach the Lord? What does he want from us anyway? It almost seems like a question that is a little bit presumptuous.

They ought to know the answer to that. Some scholars pose this as representing an entrance liturgy. In other words, how are we to approach, how are we to enter into his sanctuary? And they were hoping for some sort of a structured answer liturgy.

Obviously, the answer is quite different. The next part is our probably best-known verse in the entire book: what is good and what does God require? And then, of course, there's going to be a very, very succinct, complete answer there, and we'll spend some time with that. Then there's a transition, and this is where things get a little challenging again.

Verse nine. Well, you know, fear the name of the Lord is important in this, and obviously, because they haven't been doing that. Then the chapter is going to close with more accusations of the things that they've done wrong, transgressing the covenant in every way, and the consequences for that.

And then there's a most interesting closure to it. We need to know our history. They needed to know their history, and we're going to come back to that.

But we also need to know it, because Micah closes with, hey, you've been really intent on keeping the statutes of the house of Omri. Well, again, who was Omri? We're going to have to unpack that as well. So, with that overview in mind, covenant is there.

The dispute is ready to go. Here comes the summons, and it's verse one. Hear, therefore, what the Lord is saying.

Rise. Now, of course, we're going to ask the question, you know, who is being addressed here? Is it Micah who's supposed to hear? Are the people supposed to hear? Rise, engage the mountains in the dispute. Let the hills hear your voice.

That's the first part of the summons. And I'm going to suggest that the command here is probably directed to Micah. He is supposed to say, and then he is going to be God's covenant enforcement mediator.

We've used that term before, quoting Doug Stewart. He's going to be the one who is going to summon the witnesses, and the mountains are going to be part of this. I'm going to say more about mountains in a moment, but let the hills hear your voice, Micah.

That's probably why this is addressed to him. There's a Hebrew word, *rib*, that is used quite frequently, and we're translating it generally as dispute or charge. In the past, there have been those who have translated it as a lawsuit, but the current discussions of all this seem to move away from a more narrow understanding of that word as a lawsuit and think of it more broadly as a dispute within which charges are being made.

As I note for you, it's used as both a verb and a noun, and a number of the prophets are going to employ that particular figure. These are always issues that are addressed to God's disobedient people, the wayward people. That's the initial summons.

Micah, hear, let the hills hear your voice. The second part of the summons is verse two. Hear, O mountains.

Do you notice that the mountains are not passive? They're being called as part of God's creation to engage in this as well. Hear, O mountains, the charge of the Lord, and enduring ones, lasting foundations of the earth.

The enduring ones is a less frequently used Hebrew term, but it's in parallel, and those are the foundations of the earth, for or because the Lord has a *rib*, a dispute

with his people, and he will rebuke, contend with Israel. Now, just a note: generally, you've got heavens and earth, as I have noted for you before, are summoned as witnesses. That's the standard formula, if you will, that shows up more often than not in the book of Deuteronomy.

We see it also in Isaiah chapter one, and these are the biblical witnesses that are called. As I note for you in our wider cultural context, when you had treaties, international treaties being made followed the same kind of formal structure, broadly speaking, and then a wider range of natural phenomena were called to be witnesses because they were viewed as gods. So, you have sky, wind, earth, clouds, seas, and so forth, and so on, but here in the biblical narrative, it's mountains.

Heavens and earth, generally speaking, but here for Micah, it's mountains. Generally speaking, mountains are silent observers. They're immovable.

They're lasting, and so there's a sense of solidity there. Now, having said that I want to just throw one more possible thing to be thinking about here. As I've already said, mountains and hills are enduring silent observers.

They don't wear down too quickly, but they're called to hear the Lord. They're called to hear and be engaged as witnesses, so we have some very interesting personification going on, which is not new in the Psalms. You have hills clapping their hands and so forth and so on, but one more, and this is maybe getting out on a limb, but a possible geographical note.

Maybe if Micah is speaking in this context, his words are going to reverberate from the hills round about him. If you've ever spoken in any kind of a natural amphitheater, you know how things echo, and there's a kind of an echoing effect, and possibly that is part of it, too. They are silent observers, but they're hearing, and maybe they're going to reverberate as they do.

Well, that's verses one and two. Let's pick up verse three. Here comes the Lord's really passionate declaration.

My people, it's a covenant. My people, what have I done? And then, of course, the next preposition is interesting. What have I done to you or for you? It can be translated either way, and if it's done to you and he's then inviting them to testify against him, presumably, if they had anything to say, it would be things that he had done against them, but of course, they don't have anything to say because God's been busy providing for them, and so let's take that preposition and say, what have I done for you? And that's what he's going to go on and say.

Now, the reason I pause and waver between those two things is because the very next question from the Lord is, how have I wearied you? He's pushing them. Do they

have anything that they can accuse him of? Do they have anything they can accuse him of? And the answer is going to be no, and as I've already said, they're going to have to listen to his recital of what he has done for them, and then he says, answer me. I'm going to say more about that answer me in just a moment, but the Lord is now speaking directly.

Yes, Micah is conveying that, but Micah has been told to summon and so forth, and now the Lord says, answer me. Answer me is not just a simple, you know, give me an answer. He's really saying that in this context of the covenant dispute that we've already talked about, testify against me.

If you've got anything to say, testify against me, if you dare, probably. Now, the fact that he says, what have I done? And it's going to deal with some doings and what the Lord has indeed done in his ways and so forth, his righteous acts. In some ways, that's going to be a little pointer ahead to what the people ought to be doing, because they're supposed to do justice, verse eight.

So, there's some verbal, conceptual connections here. Well, since they don't have an answer in terms of being able to testify against the Lord, he is going to let them know what he has done for them. Here's the verse.

For I brought you up from the land of Egypt. I'm going to come back to that in a moment. And from the house of bondage, I redeemed you.

Parallel statements again, Egypt is a house of bondage, brought you up, redeemed you. And I sent before you Moses, Aaron, and Miriam. It's the only place in the prophets where we have all three of those together.

Miriam is, generally speaking, not noted in any of the other prophetic literature. Micah does. We're going to come back to that.

But first, brought up, I underlined in the quotation, and it's stronger than brought out. Oftentimes, as the national narrative is being recited, I brought you out of the house of bondage. And that's wonderful, brought out to get to Sinai and receive Torah.

But now, I brought you up. And that implies, I would suggest, their arrival. It's complete.

They're actually not just out of bondage, but they're being brought to the promised land. And it's the land promised to Abram way back in Genesis. So very significant, full statement at that point.

And so, it is indeed Israel's national narrative. It had lasting implications. Interestingly enough, in Deuteronomy 29, and Deuteronomy, of course, is Moses' re-giving the Torah, if you will, after the wilderness generation has died off.

And yet he says, we were there. Chapter four says that, too. There's a Jewish Bible commentator, Rashi, 11th century, who goes on to say, we were there.

What does that mean? That means that every generation was there at Sinai for millennia to come. This is a Jewish interpretation of it. Every generation present at Sinai, there's a continuity of corporate reality there.

Well, even if you don't want to go along with Rashi, in the biblical text we have in the Psalms, every generation was to tell the next generation. Psalm 78, verse four. Psalm 145, every generation is to repeat.

And so, interestingly enough, I've just given you a little distillation of that verse from Psalm 78, which is a long Psalm. You have recitals of God's covenant history, his covenant relationship with his people, grace peppered with rebellion. Now I'm mentioning these three representative salvation history Psalms because we're going to come back to 106 a little bit later on.

Keep in mind that this is a culture that carries on their national narratives by virtue of singing them very often. That's what the Psalms did to recite that so they would learn it well. Well, not only did he bring them up, but the Lord says, send leaders.

I sent you the leaders. And naming Moses, Aaron, and Miriam could be intended to contrast with the dismal leadership they have at this point in time. Remember, we've had hideous judges, terrible priests, and lousy prophets.

And so, for the people to be called to remember their iconic leadership as embodied in Moses and Aaron, who really were sacrificial, and Miriam also involved in this, a complete contrast. Sent, the term sent, when he says, I sent you, is also indicative of the fact that the Lord has given them their task. They are true prophets.

That's going to be quite a contrast to not only their own contemporary prophets, who are, as we've already said, lousy, but in the incident that the Lord goes on to refer to with Balaam, who kowtowed to Balak, or tried to, he was not a true prophet. He was much more dangerous because he was a prophet and supposedly speaking for the Lord with his own gains, which were based on economic stuff. We're going to come back to that.

So just a couple more things on our Moses and Aaron. In these passages, I note for you the end of Joshua, where Joshua is reciting what's been happening to them in 1

Samuel chapter 12 when Samuel is giving a review of history before he kind of steps off the scene. It refers to Moses and Aaron as well, and then Psalm 105.

Just a suggestion with Micah adding Miriam. She, too, has a part in the redemption narrative, and this is unusual. Micah is, boy, you know, we've seen him insert some unusual things into his prophecies, and of course, it's the Lord speaking through Micah.

This would capture their attention, and Miriam was a very interesting presence because from the time she stood on the bank of the Nile watching that little craft carrying Moses through the bulrushes, all the way to teaching the song of their deliverance, the Song of Moses, because after he teaches it, she teaches it as well. So, we have her serving as a prophet leader. Well, I mentioned the importance of remember a little bit ago, and now let's see what it is they're supposed to remember, and I'm going to suggest how they should have been busy filling in the blanks.

All right, so he calls them. Remember, my people, remember. Whoa, look what they're supposed to remember.

What Balak did, king of Moab, he counseled. And what Balaam, son of Beor, answered him. So, the first part of their remembrance was, I brought you up out of Egypt.

I redeemed you. I sent you leaders. And now, fast forward 40 years.

Remember what Balak, king of Moab, counseled and what Balaam, son of Beor, answered him. Let's unpack that a little bit and then do a little bit more in terms of how some things are left out that are very important that they should have been known. Counsel, it's a very interesting word.

It generally speaking means, you know, good advice. But here, it's Balak who is counseling. And so the idea is that he's king, and his counsel is supposed to be obeyed.

It's authoritative. He's calling the shots, as I indicate here. Now, here's where we have to recognize that God is calling them, not just to remember getting out of Egypt and suddenly fast forward to Balak, but I would say he's presuming that they should recall God's faithful provision between Egypt and the Promised Land as well, which included, well, God's righteous acts.

Micah is going to refer to God's righteous acts a little bit later on, verse 6. But now, part of that is what he has done for them each step of the way. And here we've got Sinai. Well, my goodness, Torah given there, the relationship established, etc., etc., etc.

Kadesh providing for them, water among other things. 40 years in the wilderness, we're told in Deuteronomy, their shoes didn't wear out, even though they were wandering for that long. Managed to get around Edom, or through it, defeating the two Amorite kings, Sihon and Og, and then Moab.

All of this is part of that in-between, coming out and up from Egypt and Balak. I've given you a little map here to kind of see how this works. This is the Sinai Peninsula, and this is our compression in that yellow line, as Micah put it.

Out of Egypt, out from Egypt, to the Promised Land, to all intents and purposes. But what they're supposed to know are the following. They're supposed to see how God gave them water, that place where the water had been bitter.

They're supposed to see at Rephidim how he cared for them. They're supposed to remember what happened at Sinai, as I just quickly thumbnail a moment ago. They're supposed to see how he brought them across that dry and terrible, dreadful wilderness.

They're supposed to remember what happened at Kadesh and the reasons why they ended up for 40 extra years because they had sent spies, and that didn't go over too well. They're supposed to remember turning away and being directed to turn away, but then suddenly to turn north, not suddenly, after 40 years, to turn north and head along the border of Edom, finally, Moab, finally to the place where they're actually going to encounter Balaam and Bilak. But that's a long journey, and it's a rather zigzaggy one, isn't it? I would suggest that remember includes all that fill-in-the-blank as well.

Well, let's now do a little bit more with this. Once they get to that critical place, just prior, I mean, you know, Moab, the king of Moab, and the Midianites, for that matter, have seen this horde of Israelites coming, and they're scared. They know what's been happening, and so they summon Balaam.

They are to remember that, and I'm reading here, even though Balaam offered to pay Bilam, or Balaam, really well. You can read that narrative in Numbers 22 through 24. The Lord repeatedly turned the curses into blessings.

Deuteronomy 23, verses 3 through 5, as well as Joshua 24, make it clear that Balaam didn't just suddenly change his mind. The Lord overruled and turned those curses into blessings. That's what he's calling them to remember right now.

The Lord has turned even someone who was presumed to be a prophet of the Lord because of his words, as was already said in Numbers chapter 22, what he said happened. But the Lord will take that and turn it. There also, we need to remember

that even though Balaam did have his curses turned into blessings, he still exercised a very wicked streak in himself, because he counseled, as I note for you here, under the table.

Numbers chapter 25, a horrible debacle with a place called Baal Peor. Followed by Numbers 31, the verses I've noted for you, 1 through 16, make it really clear that what happened at Baal Peor, where the Midianite women seduced the Israelite men to worship the Baal of Peor, what happened there and the absolute awful apostasy there was because Balaam had basically given them advice on how to do that, how to bring the Israelites down. And I would suggest, since we're going to base it on what Peter says, he did it because he loved money.

The king had said, I'm not going to reward you because you're blessing these people instead of cursing him. He changes and does it under the table. At any rate, I'm suggesting to you that this example may be what the Lord makes them focus on because Micah's audience is living in a context where the prophets, well, pretend to have the word of the Lord.

It comes across that way. And Balaam's counsel was a dangerous mixture of truth but with terrible, terrible falsehood and horrible advice built into it. All right, we could do more with Balaam, but we won't.

Even though the text does not say, remember crossing, it just says, you know, remember Shittim and Gilgal. But the point is, in getting from Shittim to Gilgal, they're going from the east side of the Jordan to the west side of the Jordan. Abba Shittim and I give them the references, was the last stop before they actually crossed the Jordan and came into the land.

And Gilgal, of course, is where they're going to set up those commemorative stones because, as the text of Joshua says, they crossed on dry ground because the Lord held back the waters, and they crossed on dry ground. Of course, the people are supposed to remember, hey, in the Exodus, they crossed on dry ground. Three times it says in the Exodus account, they crossed on dry ground because the Lord blew the sea of reeds away.

Well, at any rate, in Joshua 4:24, we have, so that all the peoples may know, and you may fear the Lord your God forever. So, they're to remember, in a nutshell, that whole deliverance narrative, the guidance, the protection, and the fact that in spite of terrible sins that took place at Shittim, the Lord brought them across. It's almost as if they're on provisional, you know, they're on probation.

He's going to bring them into the land, they're on probation. I've suggested some of these additional implications already. Let me just parse them out a little bit, and then we'll move on.

This is indeed a radical accomplishment of God's purposes. The people have been rebellious, but he gets this job done. There are, however, additional associations.

I've said this one already. They were staying at Shittim, Abel Shittim when the apostasy that I've just briefly thumbnail sketched at Baal Peor occurred. You can read all of Numbers chapter 25.

It's a terribly sad, sordid event. Gilgal. Oh, we think of Gilgal.

Oh, they're setting up these stones, and, of course, the word means something about circle, but there are little hints that later on Gilgal has some kind of negative connotations built into it. First of all, I didn't note that on here, but when Saul decides to kind of not wait for Samuel to show up because, of course, we're coming real close to the end of the time frame at Gilgal, Saul's going to offer sacrifices, even though Samuel said, wait for me. But further on, both Hosea and Amos reference inappropriate worship at Gilgal, and Hosea 9:15 is really sobering.

The Lord began to hate them there, referencing Gilgal. Well, all right, that's the history lesson. They're supposed to remember those things in order to know the righteous acts of God.

We've referenced this kind of thing earlier when we talked about the ways of the Lord, and they were supposed to learn those. All these righteous acts of God. In the covenant dispute, the Lord has said, testify against me.

They have nothing to say. Instead, he is, as I'm noting here, vindicated by all the things he's done for them. All of these things.

Just another reference to 1 Samuel 12. I referenced that a moment ago. But as Samuel is challenging the people, they want a king.

Samuel realizes it's not great, but the Lord has said, you know, go ahead and give them their king, but tell them what they're in for. Samuel says you need to remember, and he uses the same expression, the righteous acts of the Lord. At any rate, back to Micah 6 again.

That exchange now sets the stage for the next part of the dispute. The Lord has had his say. What are they going to say back? It involves what happens at the sanctuary, and they are going to ask, maybe a representative person on behalf of they, Israel, are going to ask some questions.

As I note for you, this next segment involves what happens at the sanctuary, at the place where they were to go into God's presence, at the place where their sins were

atoned for by virtue of sacrifice, and all the things that they had learned when the tabernacle was set up and the priesthood instituted at Sinai. But it seems, as I note, their memories are really thin in this regard. They seem to know some categories, but we're going to see those things really misrepresented and abused.

There is a rhetorical shift. I've intimated this already. I'll just say it again.

These next verses are questions. They're questions from people. They're questions from someone.

We don't know who that someone is. Micah is representing that someone, but how that voice speaks, the tone, the intent, how Micah is representing that, great question. I don't have all the answers.

We'll just sort through some of the things that are part of this. But the big issue, as I've suggested, is how you approach the divine presence. A reminder, I've said this already.

They knew God's presence. They knew it was accompanying them all the way along as a historical people. They were taught how to approach God.

That was all the things that had to do with the tabernacle and everything that went on there. They were also taught how to live properly with justice in the presence of God. They knew this.

They had Torah. And it's important to just get those facts back on the table in terms of what they should have had very much in the forefront of their minds as they posed these questions. All right, so rehash a quick summary.

God has gone to indescribably great lengths for them. That's been part of what we've just said. What will their response be? It's their turn.

Here it is. We'll take it piece by piece. With what shall I come before the Lord? In other words, how should I enter into the Lord's presence? That's the focus of the question if we're going to call this an entrance liturgy, which some do.

When I bow myself before the God of heaven, presuming that this is someone who has the right attitude and wants to be humble before God, should I come before him with burnt offerings, with year-old calves? Well, that's interesting. With what shall I come before the Lord? If you know the Psalms, you're well aware that that kind of question shows up in some of our favorite Psalms.

How can I ascend, stand, and approach the Lord? This is talking about coming to Zion, and when we read those Psalms, obviously they are supposed to be, the

persons who are asking them and asking that question are told there's a whole character that has to be part of this picture. Someone who is truthful, someone who's righteous, someone who has pure hands, a clean heart, clean, well anyway, not accepting bribes. Those things are part of the being of someone who should be approaching the Lord.

Well, obviously, as we read those Psalms, we know that that did not actually characterize the folks in Micah's day. The word bow myself is interesting because it's a word that means bow entirely. It's not just a nod to God's presence.

This questioner is saying, how can I come into God's presence and bow myself entirely in his presence? That's worth noting. Then, we have to ask about the offerings that this person is posing. According to Torah, these atoning sacrifices are very much necessary.

You had to come with a sacrifice. There was a whole process for doing that, to atone for sinful people. And if we're talking in terms of burnt offerings, well, that was part of it.

Leviticus 1.4, the whole burnt offering, the olah was necessary to atone for the sins. Year-old calves, both of these costly, this one especially. They were used when the priests themselves, the mediators in this worship circumstance, were ordained.

These are both, as this would-be worshiper is actually asking questions that make sense. Someone who had a reasonable amount of means could bring them if they really wanted to. But of course, our next verse shifts to major hyperbole.

Does the Lord desire, by the way, the first one was, how should I come? How should I come before? Now it's, what does he want anyway? Does the Lord desire, and here's the hyperbole, a thousand rams, myriads of streams of oil, and then, should I give my firstborn for my transgression? The fruit of my belly is a sin offering for my soul. All of these are hyperbolic statements. And to be sure, you've got oil that's used in the sanctuary.

Oil was mixed with the grain offerings. It was used to maintain the lamps in the sanctuary. There was a special anointing oil.

But the question is, do I have to bring torrents of this oil? Rivers is too mild a translation. He's, do I have to bring torrents, myriads of streams of oil? So, we're obviously stepping into that area of hyperbole. And then, of course, the really horrifying one that has all kinds of implications.

Should I give my firstborn for my transgression? Well, what is this about offering firstborns anyway? Is this simply hyperbole? Or, I mean, it is, but what is it based on?

I guess that's my question. What is it based on? So, let's step back and see if this would-be questioner has any basis in the long, ugly, sordid, traditional history of Israel for making that kind of query. Any basis at all? Well, sadly, here is our Psalm 106.

Long Psalm, these verses in the middle of it. They sacrificed their sons and their daughters to demons. They shed innocent blood, the blood of their sons and daughters.

When they sacrificed to the idols of Canaan, the land was desecrated by their blood. Again, Psalm 106 is one of those long-history Psalms. And so, this is a declaration, and I don't think it's simply, you know, symbolic or overstatement.

It seems to be that's what they were doing. Ahaz, and we've encountered him multiple times before as an apostate of apostates, passes his children through the fire. Later King Manasseh is going to do the same kind of thing.

Isaiah 57, you sacrificed your children in the ravines and under overhanging rocks. Again, it's probably not just figurative. Something else seems to be going on as part of their national ugly underbelly narrative.

And just a quick note in terms of the Hebrew here, the word for burnt offering, which is *ola*, is in several contexts used to refer to human sacrifice. Normally it refers to the animal, but there's some cases where that same word shows up when there have been human sacrifices that are part of the picture. So now we're seeing some rather, well, it's ugly stuff going on.

What are these questions pointing to? How is Micah presenting this would-be audience? Why, in verse 7, is there such a radical escalation from, you know, animals and oil to offering the firstborn? I'm just going to pose some things. These are not necessarily one solid answer, but possibly Micah is being sarcastic. He's putting questions in the mouth of somebody who is styled as being very, very thinly remembering what is supposed to be part of this and just picking out categories.

So, just to look through this a little more, this could be people's exaggerated and definitely ignorant claims that they want to really approach God. Maybe it's that. Poorly structured, bad memories.

Don't we do that way too often? We think we have religious categories in our heads, and they end up not serving us well. Or, the second possibility, a frantic crescendo on the part of the questioner, maybe speaking to the people, from what is indeed a costly sacrifice to highly inflated numbers because they're in a really tight position. The face of panic, terrified of the approach of an enemy.

How in the world can we placate God? Here we are, right up to the line. Can we do something suddenly to turn God around and make him be nice to us? Can we offer the absolute most we can? Maybe Micah is presenting them as having that kind of approach. Related to that, could this involve, and I've intimated this already, the notion that the sacrifice of a beloved child was an appropriate action? After all, a beloved firstborn son is the most important valuable thing; I don't mean to use the word thing, but a possession that a person would have being given to God; perhaps a king would do this and be expected to do this.

In the wider cultural context, we have evidence of children being sacrificed in these kinds of situations. So, any one of these or a combination thereof could be part of this picture. It's hard to say, but it's also, obviously by the time we get through these two verses, we've got questions that are representative of people who are panicked, out of control, not knowing what to do.

And their questions presume they know what they're talking about, but obviously they don't. The Lord gives, through Micah, a very calm, measured, coherent response, unlike their questions. And here it is, and this is the one that we probably memorize at some point.

He has told you, O Adam, and I'm going to leave that as Adam on purpose. What is good? What does the Lord seek from you except doing justice and love of unfailing covenant love? That's the appropriate translation. And be careful to walk with your God. Now, let's unpack that just a little bit.

The word Adam is kind of a collective referring to the people, but I'm going to suggest that maybe it's pointing them back, or pointing us back, to a wider human responsibility, too. This is what people ought to do if they're just normal, good people. They ought to be doing justice, which is kind of a common grace thing.

At any rate, in terms of God's people, they should know what's good. God has told them what's good. Psalm 100, verse 5, for the Lord is good, his mercy everlasting, his covenant love endures forever.

They should know this. It's so much part of what has just been part of the lesson they learned earlier in the chapter: doing perfect justice and loving faithfully. Again, in terms of this three-part requirement, justice.

Paris talked about mishpat and how they were abusing it. Hesed, which is unfailing covenant love, these recur over and over and over again, and they are the foundation for the covenant, and obviously then they're going to be the foundation for the rebuke that follows. I'm just making a little connection there between the term unfailing covenant love, which you're not going to see anymore.

You're going to see hesed because there's really no single word that translates hesed appropriately. So, keep in mind, this is unfailing covenant love. Loving hesed is used only here.

Usually, it's doing, right? Usually, it's doing. Here, it's used together, two terms that seem to overlap considerably, but Micah, as he usually does, is changing words and patterns enough to surprise his audience. So, in the biblical text, it's only here.

It does appear, as I note for you, in several Dead Sea texts as well, and I'm going to come back to them in a moment for another reason. All right, well, what's this third part? Walk somehow with your God. What's supposed to characterize that? Generally speaking, the stuff that we memorize it's translated humbly.

The word is hatzaneh. In terms of trying to be a good dictionary person, we only see it here and in Proverbs 11, and it's contrasted in some way with pride in Proverbs 11. So that's probably where humbly comes from, maybe.

It does occur in the Qumran text called the Community Rule. Very common text, one of the first ones that was found, Cave 1. And when you kind of pick apart that usage, and that's an interesting study all by itself, at the end of the exploration, it means something likewise or wise decorum or something that means that we are acting circumspectly. So, the point is to do justice in every aspect, to love loving relationships, and then to walk in a way that is wise and circumspect and not rash or whatever that happens to be.

Now, just a note, and then we're going to move on. It's fascinating, and this is not my observation. I've lifted it from somebody else.

People have been so consumed by how to translate that particular word that they've lost the focus on the main point, which is to walk with God. Walk with God. If we're walking with God, however that word is supposed to be translated, will be working itself out quite nicely.

Walk with God is the admonition. Well, just to kind of draw some of these things together, some folks sometimes read this and some other passages in scripture and presume that you know, these requirements of sacrifice and all that stuff are not all that important anymore. That's not what this passage is getting at all.

As I noted, these requirements are not dismissed. In terms of a New Testament connection, it's interesting that Jesus will admonish the people around him to tithe dill, mint, and cumin. Those, by the way, are very small, very small, but not bypass justice, mercy, and faithfulness.

To be sure, costly and highly emotional sacrifices and ceremonies, rituals, Amos will address that and say that's not what the Lord wants unless people's hearts are in the proper place. All right, we need to move along just a tad. I'm going to transition to the next verse, which is a challenging one, and then work towards the closure of the chapter.

Verse 9. It's good to fear the Lord, but here's the translation, and it's one of these places where it's a bit challenging. Translation. The voice of the Lord will call to the city.

Sound wisdom. He, not sure who will fear. Actually, the verb is see, but it can easily interchange fear, see your name, and then hear, O tribe, and assembly of the city.

Or, because the translation is challenging and the text is, heed the rod. What? Hear, O tribe, heed the rod and the one who has appointed it. Now, if we had all hour to spend on this, we could parse that out, but here's what we can say, and I have it here in this segment.

The voice of the Lord is calling. That ought to be taken seriously. Regardless, the voice of the Lord is calling, and therefore they are to hear.

They're to hear, and that whole summons to hear goes all the way back to the beginning of this chapter. How we parse out, whether it's tribe or rod, are the same words in Hebrew. They can mean both of those things.

Whether we're talking about an assembly or an appointment, don't worry about that now. They're to hear, and that leads to things that are very clearly not doing justice and not loving hesed. What's happened? They're not hearing.

The rest of our chapter is accusations. Again, it's difficult Hebrew, but we're going to do the best we can. Whatever is in italics, that's the challenging part, so bear with me on this.

Verse 10, still the Lord speaking, by the way. Can I overlook the house of wickedness? Okay, it's challenging there. We'll come back to parts of that.

The treasuries of wickedness. Well, that's not hard to figure out. If they've been amassing all kinds of money by virtue of their unjust dealings, they've got treasuries of wickedness.

Or the cursed, scanty ephah. Put that together with verse 11. Can I, the Lord, be considered or viewed as pure when there are wicked scales going on or a bag of deceitful stones? So even though there might be some difficult things to put together

here, one of the things we're seeing is all kinds of economic exploitation, economic falsehood, stuff that the Lord just does not put up with.

Verse 12 is another way of looking at it. Her rich men are filled with violence. Her inhabitants have spoken falsehood.

This is Jerusalem, probably. Her tongue is treachery. That's not very nice to say about anybody.

Just some clarification points. In that first verse that we looked at, house was there twice, and it could be house in Hebrew is *beit*, but if you change the vocalization a little bit, it could be *bat*, which happens to be a unit of liquid measure. And now, if that's true, the statement is being made that they are cheating.

They're cheating on measurements, whether it's liquid measure or dry measure. And then the catalog of injustices, and I just note for you what you've probably already noted. This is so diametrically opposed to what the Lord has called them to: doing justice.

A possible observation, the economic development under Uzziah may have been accompanied, we've suggested this already, may have been accompanied by shady dealings in the realm of commerce. It happens in every culture and society because we are evil people, given over to greed and things. Short measures, dishonest scales.

Those are the things that are the ephah that we talked about in the bag of stones. And these things are an abomination to the Lord, an abomination to the Lord. Several additional notes, and then we'll move on as I've intimated, even though her is just a pronoun and it isn't specifically attached to Jerusalem, that's probably who it's referring to.

I've been addressing a city prior to this, and it's shot full of violence, deceit, and treachery. And the deceit, well, it's very clear in the book of Proverbs that lying lips are an abomination to the Lord over and over again. Verses 13 through 15, the Lord continues to speak, also I, I, emphatic, have made you weak by smiting, again with that italics, we're having a little challenge there with translating it, ravaging you because of your sin.

In contrast to I, I, you, you will eat but not be satisfied. It's going to be dark. You're going to try to do something, reach, overtake, maybe get to a place of security, but you're not going to bring into security.

And those whom you do deliver, I'm going to give over to the sword. Now, I'm going to come back to the implications of that in just a moment. Verse 15, and you, you will sow and not reap.

You will tread the olive and not anoint with oil, and from new wine you shall not drink. If you know your covenant blessings and curses, grain, new wine, and oil are sort of a hallmark, and we're seeing some of those show up here. To summarize that, the divine judge will punishment, and these judgments or chastisements are straight out of the covenant curses.

So, enemies will overrun the country. We've referred over and over again to Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 27 and 28. Enemies, famine will result, which means they're not going to have olives and grapes, their standard crops.

All expectations of economic flourishing dashed, completely dashed. The whole economy is gutted, and productivity grinds to a halt. That's what's happened to these people.

And just a quick note, it refers to treading olives. Normally, when we think of these agricultural processing things, we would have treading grapes and pressing olives, but Micah says treading olives, which may indicate something about their desperation. This is just a quick picture here.

Here's what olive presses looked like. The one on the left does come from the first millennium BC. The one on the right is more of a first century AD, Jesus' time, but you notice they're big operations.

You dump your olives in there and then just really squash them with some pretty heavy stones. Treading is not what we would expect. Maybe they're doing that on a very small scale.

All right. Well, Omri and Ahab, verse 16a, the statutes of Omri have been kept. Oh, isn't that good of them? They're busy doing what Omri has asked them to do.

And every deed of the house of Ahab, well, you've walked according to their counsel. And I have a little note about just being aware of the irony here. They can't manage to do what the Lord has asked them to do, and they're forgetting all that, but oh, are they busy following what the dynasty of Omri had taught, which, of course, has to do a lot with false worship of Baal, etc., etc.

So that's our question. What do we need to remember about Omri and Ahab? Just a little bit of a map. When Omri established his capital, he did it at Samaria.

And we talked about this in, I think, the first or the second lecture. It was as if he opened his arms wide geopolitically and said, welcome. I'm going to embrace all these cultural things, which means connections with Phoenicia and other points west and the opulence of the Omri dynasty.

Perry talked and showed some pictures last time around about Samaria and the ivories that were found there, which are just really clearly well done, well worked, and probably imported, indicating that this was an opulent time. Socio-economically it appeared to be good. Religiously, horrible.

I've suggested this already woven into that whole fabric of embracing the socio-economic advantages of Phoenicia and other places was that Jezebel, married to Ahab, Omri's son, brought in the worship of Baal. It had already been there and was part of the fabric of what was going on. We saw it in the Baal Peor incident, but here it becomes a state religion, the worship of Baal.

And, of course, our theft of Naboth's vineyard, which Jezebel orchestrated, the revenge and the execution falsely of Naboth, that whole thing she was responsible for, and we suggested that when we read Micah 2, that incident may be behind the seizing property and seizing inheritance, possibly. Well, needless to say, it's a recipe for utter disaster. Close.

Verse 16, last part. I am giving you to destruction and your inhabitants to hissing, and you will bear the reproach of my people. Destruction and humiliation, that's what hissing is all about, right? Reproach.

And then he closes with my people. Now, we're going to close with just a few reflections, and we can draw these lessons out of this chapter and other places as well. We should remember that sometimes we don't do any better than the Israelites did, I'm afraid, but God calls us to remember and know, as opposed to being forgetful of God's faithfulness.

Kind of a tangent, not a tangent, but ancillary to the material in verses 6 and 7. If we're thinking about approaching God, how shall I approach him? More than anything else, we need to be overwhelmed by our need for atonement, more than anything else. And then two additional matters. It is so easy to fall into wider cultural values, even after that challenge of verse 8. It's the height of ethics and wonderful, good worship of the Lord.

The rest of the chapter is all about how they sank right back down to their cultural values, and they weren't very good, they weren't valued. And then, finally, just to kind of put us in the same crosshairs with the Israelites, we too slide back into these destructive and self-serving patterns. That's not a very happy note to close on, but we still have chapter 7 to go.

So there you have it. End of chapter 6.

This is Dr. Elaine Phillips in her teaching on the book of Micah, Prophet Outside the

Beltway. This is session 7, Micah 6.