

God's Covenant Lawsuit Against His Bride

Micah 1:1-7; Isaiah 40:18

March 29, 1998

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What is a faithful husband to do when his wife forsakes him and pursues other lovers? Is he to pretend as if nothing is wrong? Is he to extend endlessly his patience and toleration toward outright adultery? Certainly in the earthly realm, we would neither expect a faithful husband nor a faithful wife in such a situation to say nothing nor do nothing in response to an adulterous spouse. Our Confession of Faith (24:5) correctly summarizes the Word of God in cases of such infidelity in marriage:

In the case of adultery after marriage, it is lawful for the innocent party to sue out a divorce, and, after the divorce, to marry another, as if the offending party were dead.

If this is true in the earthly realm, how much more it is true in the heavenly or spiritual realm, when the husband in this case is Jehovah and Israel is His bride. Not only is He the innocent party, but He is absolutely righteous in all His ways and holy in all His works. Not only is He the faithful party, but He is most perfect in love and affection toward His unfaithful wife. Although chosen by God out of all the nations of the earth to be His bride, although loved by God and forgiven of her many harlotries—although blessed with His law, the temple, the priesthood, and the ordinances as tokens of His gracious affection, Israel continues to spurn His invitations of love and offers of communion.

What action does the Lord take? We shall see the action taken by the Lord in the prophecy of Micah as he declares God's covenant law suit against His unfaithful wife, Israel. Although Israel (the northern 10 tribes) and Judah (the southern 2 tribes) have long since divided into two distinct kingdoms, nevertheless, the Lord continues to address these two kingdoms as one bride.

As we study the prophecy of Micah, we shall note parallels between Israel of old and the new Israel. We shall observe parallels between Israel as a covenanted nation and covenanted nations of the present time. The prophecy of Micah is ancient in one sense, and yet it is as contemporary as the morning news in another sense. Through a study of Micah's prophecy, we shall see the unfathomable grace of Jesus Christ, and yet the awful judgment of the Most High God. Herein is displayed the righteous jealousy of the Lord our God who calls for the loving and pure worship of a thankful bride.

There are three major divisions within Micah's prophecy and each one is distinguished from the other by the gracious call of God to His unfaithful bride to hear what He declares to her (Micah 1:2; Micah 3:1; Micah 6:1). Even as the apostle Paul could say to the Corinthians, "This is the third time I am coming to you. In the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established" (2 Corinthians 13:1)

Remember, this is a lawsuit and herein is brought forward three verbal witnesses which testify to God's charge against His unfaithful bride. Even as the Lord in the days of Micah called out to His unfaithful bride who was rent by division, so today the Lord still only has one bride (there is only one visible church universal throughout the world over which Christ is the head). And although she is rent by many divisions and exhibits much unfaithfulness in doctrine, worship, government, and discipline, nevertheless, Christ still pleads with His bride to return to Him from all her spiritual harlotries. His righteous jealousy still burns for His wife to be faithful in loving Him in one doctrine, one worship, one government, and one discipline. The Lord still speaks to us today, "Hear, all ye people" (Micah 1:2); "Hear, I pray you" (Micah 3:1); "Hear ye now what the LORD saith" (Micah 6:1).

I. The Messenger of the Lawsuit (Micah 1:1).

A. His name.

1. Micah is a shortened form of Micaiah and means, “Who is like Jehovah?” In a sense, the name of this prophet summarizes the whole message that he brings to Israel and Judah. Micah’s name actually rebukes the chief sin which Israel was guilty of committing against the Lord their God—idolatry. What image of man’s making is like Jehovah (Isaiah 40:18)? Israel and Judah had departed from the Lord by imagining and inventing new ways of worshipping Jehovah or even by introducing the ways of the heathen into their worship of God. But all such religious worship is a lie or a counterfeit, for it replaces the will of God with the work of man’s mind, voice, or hands—which is the essence of idolatry. It is to worship the creature rather than the creator. It is to prefer in our heart an image of our own making to the invisible God Himself. Israel had gone after abominable imitations of God rather than pursuing the Lord God Himself.

B. His circumstances.

1. He was from a village within Judah by name of Moresheth-gath (1:14) or Mareshah (1:15).

2. He prophesied during the reigns of three kings of Judah: Jotham (2 Chronicles 27:2); Ahaz (2 Chronicles 28:1-4); and Hezekiah (2 Chronicles 29:2; 31:1). He was a younger contemporary of Isaiah the prophet, who began his prophetic ministry in the days of Uzziah, Jotham’s father. In fact, the same prophecy concerning the blessings and peace that will exist in the messianic kingdom is spoken of in Micah 4:1-3 and Isaiah 2:2-4 in nearly identical words. Micah’s covenant lawsuit is directed against the one bride of the Lord existing in Samaria (the capital of the northern kingdom of Israel) and Jerusalem (the capital of the southern kingdom of Judah).

C. His commission.

1. Micah’s commission to bring this covenant lawsuit against Israel and Judah came directly from the Lord (“The word of the LORD that came to Micah”). He did not offer his own thoughts or the opinions of others in his message. He did not strive for a majority position or consensus before declaring his prophecy. He did not try to make his message more acceptable by throwing in some humor or appealing to the good nature of the people. Like all of the prophets of old, he knew his message would not be well received by the people, but as a prophet he was not out to win a popularity contest or to gain the approval of men. He was the voice of the Lord God. He was an ambassador representing the King. He had one important commission above all else and that was to declare the word of the Lord in all its purity and power (Jeremiah 26:17-19).

2. Although ministers of the New Covenant are not prophets in the extraordinary sense, nevertheless, they have a prophetic function in that they, too, are not judged by how dynamic they are. They are not judged by the size of their congregation. They are not judged by the number of degrees behind their name. They are judged by their faithfulness to the message God has given them to preach. John (Revelation 1:20) calls ministers “angels”, for they have been given a divine message and are sent out on a divine mission. John also refers to ministers as “stars”, for as stars they are to reflect the glorious light of the gospel to all who will hear in this very dark world.

II. The Husband of the Lawsuit (Micah 1:2-4).

A. Here begins the first major division in Micah’s prophecy: “Hear, all ye people, hearken, O earth.” This first section continues to the end of Chapter 2.

B. Micah (as God’s prosecuting attorney) charges the people of Israel and Judah (and all that are in the land rather than in the earth) to appear in court for their spiritual adultery (i.e. idolatry). The Lord Himself

(as the faithful husband to His bride) will testify against her from His holy temple in heaven.

C. Perhaps the people had trusted in their religious privileges to save them from the righteous anger of a jealous God. Perhaps they looked to their external covenant relationship in Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to avert God's anger. Or maybe it was the fact that God had chosen them to be His bride, and, therefore, He would not judge them for their idolatry. Or possibly they reasoned that God could not forget that it was to them that the law, the temple, the priesthood, the feasts, and the ordinances had been given. The Lord will hear none of it, for the countless outward privileges which He freely bestowed upon His bride will not excuse them for their unfaithfulness to Him, but will in fact make them all the more responsible for their sin against Him.

D. How we too can so easily fall into the snare of pride in thinking that because we are the children of Rutherford, Gillespie, Cameron, Cargill, and Renwick God will wink at our sins. Or because we own the lawful covenants of our forefathers (The National Covenant of Scotland and the Solemn League and Covenant of the Three Kingdoms) and offer to Him the outward forms of pure worship that He will receive us, even though our hearts may be far from Him. The Jews thought that because the physical temple was still standing, they were safe. To many it had become a superstitious ornament in which to boast, while the heavenly temple wherein the Lord dwelt in all His glory had little or no significance. Dear ones, outward signs and privileges authorized by God are not to be trusted in. They are blessings intended to lead us to trust in the Lord and love Him with all of our heart.

E. Micah 1:3-4 figuratively depicts the Lord descending from His throne in heaven to trample under foot all of the high and lofty places in Israel and Judah that have proudly exalted themselves against the Lord their God—whether kings and princes, whether priests or prophets, or whether commoner or slave. God will send the Assyrians and then the Babylonians against them, not only for their idolatry, but even for glorying and boasting in it in the very face of God who betrothed them to Himself (The First Commandment—"before my face"). This further aggravates the abomination of the idolatry committed (Romans 1:32).

F. Dear ones, do we have the spiritual insight to see that the Lord has come forth from His holy temple and has testified against the Church's unfaithfulness and our nation's unfaithfulness to Him? Do we not see God coming from His holy temple in judgment by means of floods, tornadoes, ice storms, and earthquakes, by means of wars throughout the world, by means of the idolatry and false religion tolerated within covenanted nations, the covenant breaking, the blasphemy, the Sabbath breaking, the destruction of the family, the ungodly magistrates, the unfaithful shepherds in churches, the murder of unborn children, the rampant increase of adultery, sodomy, fornication, and pornography? He is still a jealous Husband, and He still calls His Bride to love Him in all purity of doctrine and worship. Dear ones, there is coming a time when the Lord will judge the great whore and all of her daughters who have learned well to ply her corrupt inventions in doctrine and worship (Revelation 17:16-18). Therefore, the Lord cries out to His true bride wherever she may be (Revelation 18:4).

III. The Cause of the Lawsuit (Micah 1:5-7).

A. So often our eyes fall upon abortion or sodomy as being the chief sins for which God will judge a people. And so many professing Christians join with any religious group that opposes these sins. These professing Christians believe they have a common enemy in abortion and sodomy. However, according to God's Word, those heinous sins are simply the fruit of the root sin which leads to all other sins in our lives, in the family, in the church, and in the nation: idolatry (Romans 1:18ff). Thus, such professing Christians stand with those many times whose blatant idolatry and heresy is the very cause of the abortion and sodomy. For you see, dear ones, when we carelessly begin to ignore, neglect, or despise the first four commandments

concerning our duty to God, it will not be long before we find ourselves breaking the last six commandments concerning our duty to our neighbor. For when we have little or no reverence for the Lord Himself, we have little or no reverence for man who is made in His image.

B. If it be asked by Israel or Judah, “Why is God so angry?” The answer is given by the Lord (Micah 1:5). The Lord declares that His righteous anger is due: (1) to the transgression of Samaria, which refers to the corrupt worship established by Jeroboam (1 Kings 12:25-33; Hosea 2:11; Amos 5:21-23; Amos 6:5); and (2) to the corrupt worship tolerated in Jerusalem upon the high places (1 Kings 3:2; 1 Kings 14:23).

C. Samaria was certainly much farther along in her idolatry and would receive God’s judgment first. However, note that God does not excuse Judah for building her high places and offering sacrifices thereon to the Lord. For idolatry is never static. It is never neutral. It is dynamic and always becoming more self-consistent. Thus, to introduce one ceremony or one image not authorized by God is in principle to introduce the whole papal system. This is what Jerusalem did and it led to her downfall (Hosea 4:15; Jeremiah 3:6-10).

D. This is likewise the error of many Protestant Churches that have fallen away from the Regulative Principle of Worship—what is not authorized in the New Covenant is forbidden. Because Protestant churches are now operating on the same principle as Rome (what is not forbidden in the Word is permitted), they have been ever so gradually introducing her monuments of idolatry into worship (holy days, instruments, uninspired hymns, and images of every kind).

E. The words of Calvin (*Commentaries*, 14:165) on this text are precisely to the point:

The Israelites [of the northern kingdom—GLP] had so fallen, that they were altogether degenerated; nothing could be seen among them that had an affinity to the true and legitimate worship of God: but the Jews [of the southern kingdom of Judah—GLP] had retained some form of religion, they had thus not abandoned themselves; but yet they had a mixture of superstitions; such as one would find, were he to compare the gross Popery of this day with that middle course which those men invent, who seem to themselves to be very wise, fearing, forsooth, as they do, the offenses of the world; and hence they form for us a mixture, I know not what, from the superstitions of the Papacy and from the Reformation, as they call it. Something like this was the mixture at Jerusalem. We however see, that the Prophet pronounces the same sentence against the Jews and the Israelites, and that is, that God will allow nothing that proceeds from the inventions of men to be joined to his word. Since then God allows no such mixtures, the Prophet here says, that there was no less sin on the high places of Judea, than there was in those filthy abominations which were then dominant among the people of Israel.

F. For what is an idol in its most basic sense? It is erecting the will and work of man in place of the will and work of God (whether in our affections, speech, or behavior). It may be unintentional. It may be done with good intentions. But an idol takes God off His throne and places the creature in some way on the throne, whether by way of man’s invention, man’s work, man’s reason/mind, man’s will, or man’s affections. It is argued by Rome and others that man-made images in worship are simply a book for the illiterate in order that they might understand God and His truth. But God forbids man from making his own images for worship (Deuteronomy 4:15-19). Why? Because they are all lies (Habakkuk 2:18)! They deceive and lead man away from the truth about God by limiting the infinite God to the work of man’s hands (as if man could picture the infinite God). And so it is with every sin or error by which man forms a counterfeit work of his own hands.

G. In our text, God makes clear that for these sins He will judge both Israel and Judah. And the hire or wealth that has come from their idolatry will be given over to the idolatrous Assyrians and Babylonians (Micah 1:7).

IV. Conclusion

A. Remember, dear ones, that idolatry is the root sin from which all other sins proceed in your life and mine. Therefore, let us be ever so diligent that we do not grow cold or indifferent in our lives to Christ and His ordinances. The key to overcoming idolatry is to grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ. Let not your faith become stagnant. Let not your knowledge become merely internalized. Fan the embers of love for Christ and your brethren. Flee temptation, rather toying with it.

B. Husbands or wives, what would you think of your spouse if he/she became more devoted to a picture of you or a watch or ring given by you than to you yourself? You see, when the creature replaces the Creator in our affections, when the gifts replace the giver of those gifts, we have fallen into idolatry.

C. Remember, who is like Jehovah? To whom or to what will you compare our God? Micah 7:18-19.

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