

A five-week bible study course, written by Anna Williams and Rev. Kathleen Allen from the Basildon Churches in the SE Essex Circuit.

This focuses on the themes of “judgement and promise” in the book of Micah and aims to help groups to engage with challenges of justice and the Walking with Micah Justice Conversations.

Walking With Micah

“Judgement and Promise”

Key messages:

- The people will face national catastrophe because God will punish sinfulness, idolatry and the hateful injustice of the people
- Hope for the future as Micah foretells of a time of universal peace including the coming of the Messiah (Micah 5:2-5a)
- Micah tells the people how they can turn back to God and instructs them, and us, “to act justly, love mercy and walk humbly with God”. (Micah 6:6-8)



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Structure of each of the sessions:

- Notes on the passage
- Questions
- New Testament links
- Discussion around the issues raised
- Walking with Micah actions and discussions

Background:

Following the death of Solomon in 931 BCE the kingdom of Israel is divided into the Northern kingdom (Israel), with Samaria as its capital and Jerusalem the capital city of the southern kingdom (Judah).

In 722/721 BCE Assyria swept north and captured Samaria (Israel); its inhabitants were deported and scattered around the empire. In approximately 701 BCE, Sennacherib, king of Assyria, lay siege to Jerusalem. However, the Assyrian army failed to take the city, and this led to the misguided belief that Jerusalem was inviolate: as God's chosen people they could never be taken.

God's word, in the book of Micah, is directed to the people of Samaria and Jerusalem, its rulers and false prophets. Instead of leading the people in true worship and obedience to God's law, those in authority lived sinful lives and encouraged the same in God's people, the worship of idols and abuse of the poor and marginalised. In 722/721 BCE Israel pays the price for this disobedience, sinfulness and idolatry as does Jerusalem, when the Babylonians, under Nebuchadnezzar 11, successfully take the city, in 587 BCE.

Who was Micah?

Micah, an Old Testament prophet, lived at Moresheth, a very small village in rural countryside about 25 miles from Jerusalem. Although the terrain would have been rugged, Micah would also be able to find beauty and peace in the countryside. This was in marked contrast to the great city of Jerusalem where the people had turned away from God and were openly living sinful and idolatrous lives.

Micah was a contemporary of Isaiah and Amos. Micah, like Amos, was distressed at how the powerful and wealthy lived in stark contrast to the powerless and those without financial security. Micah had the same vision of national disaster for Judah as the prophet Amos did for Israel. Micah 1:1 begins that 'The word of the Lord' came to him during the reigns of 3 Kings, about 30 years, around 742-687BC. Micah, a man of honesty and integrity, is called to deliver God's words and challenge the people about their sinfulness and injustice. But Micah also delivers God's promises of forgiveness, redemption and salvation.

As we journey through this book, we will be challenged in our own lives as well as the life of our churches and small groups. May the Holy Spirit guide our thinking and conversations as we explore new opportunities to "act justly, love mercy and walk humbly with our God" (Micah 6:8)

Week 1: Judgement

Read Micah 1:1 – 2:11

Micah 1:3- 1:5 God's power and might

Micah begins by calling the people to “hear” him. To the people this would have been an **instruction** not a suggestion! Note Micah immediately reminds the people of **who** God is warning them of His mighty power. Look at the poetic descriptions in verse 4. How do they help you to picture God?

Micah 1: 6-17 God's judgement on Samaria

What does God's judgement look like? Micah foretells the downfall and destruction of Samaria. God's power will lead to total destruction. Samaria has been singled out because Micah says the sinfulness in that city is spreading to Jerusalem. How have the people sinned against God? Micah immediately uses harsh descriptive language in communicating God's words.

In verse 14, Micah is predicting that towns in Judah will be taken captive by the surrounding nations. This prophecy is fulfilled as the Assyrians conquered most of Israel in 734BC; Samaria and the northern kingdom was conquered in 722-721BC.

Micah 2:1-11

Micah immediately lists the sins of the people (v2) and he highlights those who “plan iniquity” and who are powerful enough to carry out their wicked schemes and abuse others (v3-4). Look at how the Lord will deal with these people. Then Micah gives a warning to the “false prophets” who are giving incorrect information to the people. Look at the way this impacts on the women and children.

Questions:

- 1. Micah addresses Samaria and Jerusalem because, as capital cities, they'll give a fair indication of the nation's morality. Using this as an example, what might Micah say to our nation?**
- 2. Micah lists the ways in which the rich and powerful rob those who are vulnerable. What are the modern-day equivalents?**
- 3. Micah identifies “false prophets” who will tell the people what they want to hear. Who are the “false prophets” in our society?**

New Testament link:

Micah brought clear messages especially to the leaders and of the time. During his ministry Jesus frequently confronted the Pharisees and temple officials in how they had determined the law. People coming to the temple were openly exploited and there was a hierarchy of who could enter which part of the temple. Jesus is angry when he finds the temple courtyards being used for trading – **read John 2:13-22.**

This confrontation and challenge would lead to Jesus' trial and crucifixion. **Read Matthew 9:9-17** to see how Jesus goes against the social expectations of he should be meeting and answers his critics questions.



Our calling

Micah's calling:

The prophet Micah was called to deliver “the word of God” to the people. His words are honest, even harsh, and spoken with integrity. Micah did not soften the messages or visions, he did not placate leaders and kings. Micah highlighted the injustice on women and children.

Looking at his words we can question whether we are as direct in our conversations with others. Who are the “modern-day” Micahs?

What is our calling?

In his speech to launch the Walking With Micah project, the Rt Hon Gordon Brown gave a lecture entitled “Justice and Hope”. Gordon Brown reminded his listeners that Methodists have been inspirational in changing attitudes including John Wesley who was committed to social reform, abolition of the slave trade and prison reform.

Look at the work of All We Can, Action for Children and MHA which show the commitment of Methodists to see justice for all people in God's world. The Methodist church formed **CJ4A (Climate Justice for All)**, a youth-led group from 6 countries - Britain, Uruguay, Italy, Zambia and Fiji to consider climate change in preparation for COP26. **CJ4A** reminds us of John Wesley's declaration that “God's love is for all” and that climate justice “intersects with many other justice issues”.

Walking With Micah Action: To use the resources to plan “Justice Conversations”. Explore the context of your church and the people you might invite to a conversation. Be sensitive to participants and ensure these are “safe conversations”.

<https://www.methodist.org.uk/our-work/our-work-in-britain/social-justice/walking-with-micah/walking-with-micah-justice-conversations/>

Week 2:and Promises

Read Micah 2:12 – 4:5

Micah 2:12-13 deliverance and hope

Micah has delivered clear messages from God about their lifestyle and choices and the consequences of their actions. It would seem to be an irreversible situation. But then Micah gives them God's promise of "deliverance". God's people have been spread throughout the region through war and captivity. Micah begins by talking about a future time when God's people will be "gathered up" like sheep into a sheepfold or to pasture. A promise that God has not given up on His people. Many of the people were sinful but there were groups of believers faithful to God's word.

Micah 3 prophecy of the downfall of Jerusalem

Micah returns to rebuking the leaders and rulers of the people then the prophets. List the ways in which these two groups of influential people are leading others away from God. Micah says that God will turn his face away from these sinful people and will not answer their cries when they want help. Do we recognise this situation in our country today? Why do people turn to churches when there is a disaster?

Micah's messages prophesying the destruction of Jerusalem (3:11- 12) were deeply shocking. The people believed God had saved Jerusalem from almost certain disaster when Sennacherib's army had failed to take the city, therefore, it could never be overcome. They were God's chosen people, weren't they? Micah's message challenges their belief that they would always be saved. Had they become complacent and assumed that it didn't matter how they responded to God?

Micah 4:1-5 a promise of future peace

This will be an amazing time when God's people are walking in His name and following His laws. Look at Micah's descriptions. Can we imagine a world where there is no war, no injustice, no fear and everyone is safe? If we are to experience God's peace, we need to lead faithful lives.

Questions:

1. Micah picks out the leaders and prophets because they are in a position of leadership. What parallels can you see with our society and culture today? What challenges do believers face when they are in the minority in society?
2. Micah 3:9-12 tells God's people that Jerusalem will be totally destroyed. Were God's people complacent? When have we become complacent in conforming to the norms of society rather than following our faith?
3. Micah says the leaders and prophets "hate good and love evil". As Christians we need to "love good and hate evil". How can we be more passionate about "hating evil" and challenging injustice?

New Testament links:

God delights in faith that produces justice, love for others and obedience because true faith leads to kindness, compassion, justice and humility. Peace in God comes through faithfulness. Look at examples of Jesus offering "peace" - **John 14:27, John 16:33** and **John 20:22-23**. In **Romans 12:9-10** Paul tells the Christians in Rome to "hate what is wrong" and "hold tightly to what is good".



Fighting injustice - what does it mean to be a "justice seeking church"?

Micah's calling:

Micah's calling was to deliver God's promises even though the people were sinful and disobedient. Micah particularly singles out people in positions of responsibility and power – the leaders and prophets.

What is our calling?

The WWM project seeks to explore what it means to be a "justice seeking" church in our own communities and more widely. Where do we recognise injustice in our local community? How can we challenge injustices?

Where can we hear the voice of the church?

The Methodist Church works ecumenically with other churches in the UK to promote social justice through **JPIT (Joint Public Issues Team)**.

Explore the JPIT website for resources to help your church speak out with a Christian voice on injustice.

www.jointpublicissues.org.uk



Walking With Micah Action: To LISTEN before speaking. How are you going to use the WWM resources to encourage people to share their experiences? How might the digital resources be useful in understanding injustice and prompting conversations?

Week 3: The Lord's plan and the promise of the Messiah

Read Micah 4:6 – 5:15

Micah 4:6-13 God's promise to Israel

Micah tells the people that one day the people who have been dispersed will be brought together. They will be reunited and become a strong nation. But this will not happen quickly. In verses 9-13 Micah prophesies a time when Jerusalem will be taken captive and the people exiled into Babylon. This would end the rule of kings and the kingdom they thought would last forever destroyed.

This clear message warns the people about the consequences of their behaviour if they do not turn it around. But the people continued their sinful behaviour and history shows that God sent His people into exile around 600 BC for about 70 years.

Micah 5 – The promise of the Messiah

Micah tells of God's promise of a new king who will be of the line of David. Out of a small insignificant town called Bethlehem (v2) will come a mighty and eternal king. Micah is prophesying the birthplace of Jesus hundreds of years before it happens. This King will be a shepherd to His people and his majesty and strength will be in God. This is God's rescue plan for the nations and people who believe in Him.

Micah talks of a time of security. Weapons of war will not be needed because God will rule in every person's heart. But again, there is also a warning (v10-15) to those who have not obeyed God. All the symbols of pagan worship will be destroyed.

Questions:

- 1. In the bible exile = suffering, it was God's punishment on the sinful people. God's purpose was that the people would cry out to be rescued and they would return to Him. When are we most likely to "cry out" to God? How do we expect God to answer our cries?**
- 2. Micah predicts the birth of Jesus and that he would come as a baby. With our knowledge of the New Testament how might we explain this to others?**

3. Micah is prophesying a time of deep peace, more than just the absence of conflict and war. When have you experienced the peace of God? What can enable us to reach those times of that deep peace - “Shalom”?

New Testament links:

Read Luke 2: 22-40 Mary and Joseph have taken Jesus to the temple to follow Jewish rituals. Through their wisdom and experience, Simeon and Anna recognise the significance of this baby and confirm his future role. Simeon has been told by the Holy Spirit he will see the Messiah before he dies, and Anna foretells the redemption of Jerusalem.

God is faithful throughout time seeking a relationship with His people. Through the prophets he has repeatedly given the people the opportunity to turn back to Him. Yet it requires the sacrifice of Jesus to restore relationship **read John 3:16-21**. Through Jesus we can repent and be forgiven.



Hope for our communities and nation

Micah’s hopes?:

The Bible does not record how the prophets felt about their communities. But they were persistent risking ridicule, rejection even persecution or imprisonment. The prophets aim was to turn God’s people from their sinful ways to a better life.

The Christmas carol “O little town of Bethlehem” talks of “the hopes and fears of all the years” being met in the birth of Jesus.

What are our “hopes and fears” for our communities and the world?

The Methodist Church with partners in JPIT drew up “Six Hopes” for society.



- Reflect on the hopes of the Methodist Church/JPIT in the nation and the world
- Reflect on your hopes for the work of your church in your local community and the circuit.

Walking With Micah Action: To reflect on our/church vision for a “more just” world. What is God’s vision for world justice?

**How can justice conversations inform church planning and engage with local communities?
How can we draw in those groups that use the church premises during the week but do not
come on Sundays? How can we reach outside our regular church groups to include “missing
groups” and hear “intergenerational” conversations?**

Week 4: What does God require of us?

Read Micah 6

Micah 6:1-7

Micah begins by instructing the people “to listen”. This section is set out as an argument in a court room where God is the witness for the prosecution (v3-5). God reminds the people that he brought them out of slavery in Egypt. God does not want sacrifices which would have been customary of the time.

Micah 6:8 So what does God require of His people **then and now?**

⁸ He has shown you, O mortal, what is good.

And what does the LORD require of you?

To act justly and to love mercy

and to walk humbly with your God.

*The NIV translation uses the word “mercy” others use “kindness”

Micah 9-16

Micah continues to remind the people of their wrongdoing – cheating and lying. Weights and measures (v11) are used in the Old and New Testaments as indicators of honesty and fairness. Look at what will happen if the people do not follow God.

Questions

- 1. Micah calls on the people to “act justly”. When have you have been called to “act justly” either for yourself or someone else? What is the difference between legal justice (the law of the country) and God’s Holy justice?**
- 2. Mercy can be defined as an act of compassion and kindness towards another person (or nation) when you have the power or right to harm them. Throughout time God is merciful to His people. What makes showing mercy person to person or nation to nation difficult?**

3. What do you think Micah means by being “humble”? What is the difference between “humble” and “humility”? Why do we need to be humble in our relationship with God?

New Testament links

Read Luke 10: 25-37 This is just one example of Jesus challenging injustice and prejudice through his ministry. Look also at Jesus’ relationships with women, people who were seen as “unclean” and social outcasts.

Walking humbly with God was central to Jesus and he left the crowds to spend time in prayer with “His Father”. Before his first miracle in Cana Jesus paused to make sure he was acting in God’s time, **John 2:1-11**.

“To act justly, love mercy and walk humbly with God” requires a complete change in thinking and lifestyle. **Read John 3:1-10** where Jesus tells Nicodemus what he must do. Paul writing to the Christians in Rome describes it taking off your dark deeds like dirty clothes and putting on shiny armour (**Romans 13:11-12**)



Micah’s calling:

Micah 6:8 is the key verse in the book of Micah - Micah tells the people what they have to do. He tells the faithful how they must act and live their lives.

Our calling:

Micah 6:8 is central to the WWM project as it is essential that we keep those instructions in mind if we are to reflect God’s love to others. We need to walk alongside not “do to others”, a journey not a race. Jesus ministry was to bring people back to God and we can see this through his words and actions. We need to “live” the words if we are to show what it means to have faith and believe in God.

We can begin by doing a “spiritual check up”. What do we need to do to allow our relationship with God to grow? Think about the opportunities to meet, talk and pray that allow us to walk more closely with God. Do we use Jesus as our guide in our planning and living? If our faith is true then we will want justice for others. We will “hate” that which leads to others being down trodden, ill treated and abused. Our peace comes from loving God, following Jesus and allowing the Holy Spirit to work in and through us.

Walking With Micah Action: To reflect on seeking justice in our own communities and more widely. Love and hate are passionate emotions. Does WWM excite us to want to act on injustice? How might WWM encourage and develop your church plans, inform decisions and make change happen?

Week 5: Confidence in God's future

Read Micah 7

Micah 7: 1-6

As a final warning Micah talks about "Israel's misery", a time when there will be bloodshed, the legal system has broken down and people don't trust each other even within families.

Micah 7:7-13

But then Micah, who is faithful to God, says "he will watch in hope... my God will hear me". He is confident that one day God will allow Israel "to rise up". Micah believes that although he is "sitting in darkness", the Lord will be his light. Micah talks of that light illuminating everything in its path. There will be light out of the "desolation" due to the people's sins.

Micah 7:14-20

This final section is described as "prayer and praise". It is a prayer for salvation, a time when people will turn back to God in fear and trepidation (v14-17). It will be time of reckoning as the people and nations see their sinfulness.

Micah's hope is in God – "Who is a God like you?" Micah then talks of God's forgiveness and compassion. Sins and "iniquities" will be "thrown" into the "depths of the ocean". Micah assures the people that God is faithful to the promises he made to their ancestors. The cities will be rebuilt, and they will return home. The vision promised to Micah of a new and mighty King coming from Bethlehem will be realised.

Questions:

- 1. Do you recognise similarities between the society Micah describes and ours today? Social media has allowed people's lives to be exposed and can be seen as the way we could/should live. How should we respond to changing influences in society?**
- 2. Micah prophesied over a period of 30 years. This required faithfulness and belief. Being challenged can make us more resilient. How has your faith grown in times of adversity?**
- 3. Micah talks of "darkness" and "light". This is reflected throughout the New Testament and in many hymns and worship songs. Jesus came as the "light of the world". How can we be "lights" to others?**

New Testament links:

Jesus came as the “light of the world”. This is first referenced by John the Baptist who announced the coming of the light of the world read **John 1:4-9**. There are many occasions when Jesus confirms he is the light of the world read **John 8:12 and 12:36**. Light is essential so that we can see and know where we are going read **John 11:9 and 12:35**. Jesus offers everyone who believes in him the “light of life”. In John 12:36 those who follow Jesus are described as “sons of light”. In Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus tells his disciples “to let your light shine before men that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven” **Matthew 5:14**.

At the end times, when Jesus returns, the world will be illuminated by the glory of God and the light of Jesus read **Revelation 21:23-25**.



Next steps.....

Micah’s calling:

Micah has delivered God’s judgements and His promises. He has described very dark times but also brought the promise of hope and light. Micah’s instruction to “**act justly, love mercy (or kindness) and walk humbly with God**” gives us a way to live as Christians but also demands action. If we are pleasing God we need to be prepared to follow Jesus wherever that takes us. The life of a prophet was challenging even demanding, are we also prepared to live out our faith?

Our calling:

Our calling is to follow faithfully and share the light of Jesus in our lives, churches and communities. We need to maintain a daily relationship with God through reading, prayer and dialogue with others. Ask for the Holy Spirit to open our eyes to events around us that we might see situations through the eyes of Jesus. We need to be bold when necessary and silent at other times to hear the voices crying out. We are the lights of the world so let our lights shine out in the darkness.

Walking With Micah Action: To use the WWM resources to keep social justice on our church and circuit agendas. Often stories become “newsworthy” for a few hours or days. But social justice issues are ongoing and there are no “quick fixes”. There is strength and courage when people engage with each other and we need to be bold in our conversations and decisions.

Where we have highlighted potential injustice what action are we going to take?

Evaluation

(0=not at all, 10= greatly)

My knowledge of Micah before the course

0 _____ 10

My knowledge of Micah at the end of the course

0 _____ 10

I knew about the WWM project before the course

0 _____ 10

My knowledge has increased about the WWM project during the course

0 _____ 10

The book of Micah has encouraged me think and act justly

0 _____ 10

The book of Micah and WWM has encouraged our church to look at social injustices

0 _____ 10

The resources have encouraged me to read more widely and explore the
WWM website

0 _____ 10

Comments:

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- www.biblegateway.com to source a variety of translations
- Life Application Study Bible (NIV) , Kingsway Publications

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