

Micah

Chapter 6

The Lord's Case Against Israel

Listen to what the LORD says: “Stand up, plead your case before the mountains; let the hills hear what you have to say. ² Hear, O mountains, the LORD’s accusation; listen, you everlasting foundations of the earth. For the LORD has a case against his people; he is lodging a charge against Israel. ³ “My people, what have I done to you? How have I burdened you? Answer me. ⁴ I brought you up out of Egypt and redeemed you from the land of slavery. I sent Moses to lead you, also Aaron and Miriam. ⁵ My people, remember what Balak king of Moab counseled and what Balaam son of Beor answered. Remember your journey from Shittim to Gilgal, that you may know the righteous acts of the LORD.” ⁶ With what shall I come before the LORD and bow down before the exalted God? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? ⁷ Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? ⁸ He has showed you, O man, 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.

6:1–16 This chapter depicts a courtroom scene in which the Lord lodges a legal complaint against Israel. In vv. 1–2 the Lord summons the people to listen to his accusation and to prepare their defense against the charges that follow in vv. 9–16. The Lord speaks in vv. 3–5, poignantly reminding the people of his gracious acts in their behalf. In vv. 6–7 Israel is speaking, and in v. 8 Micah responds directly to the nation, answering the questions of vv. 6–7. God charges the people with specific wrongs in vv. 9–16. (CSB)

6:1–2 *mountains ... foundations of the earth.* Inanimate objects were called on as third-party witnesses because of their enduring nature and because they were witnesses to his covenant (see Dt 32:1; Jos 24:27; Isa 1:2 and note). (CSB)

The mountains and hills, having stood during the time of Israel's entire history, could witness to the facts which were here brought out. (Kretzmann)

Mount Sinai saw the Lord enter into a covenant relationship with Israel (EX 19:1-7). Through thousands of worship services on Mt. Zion the Savior drew near to His people and drew them near to Him. And the many hills in ancient Canaan blushed with shame as they watched faithless Israel practicing idolatry on their very summits (1 Kings 14:23) (PBC)

6:1 *Hear.* Micah turned his vision away from the future (chs 4–5) and directed the people to hear what God had to say to them (1:2; 6:2, 9). (TLSB)

plead your case before the mountains. The Lord put Israel on trial and called on the mountains to be the jury. (TLSB)

6:2 *Israel.* Primarily Judah here. (CSB)

indictment. The Lord, as plaintiff, charged Israel with failure to do what He required (v 8). (TLSB)

HE IS LODGING A CHARGE – The defendants could never be exonerated, except by God’s own gracious intervention in His covenant and its promises, sealed and fulfilled in Christ.

6:3 *My people.* Indicative of a tender rebuke (see also v. 5). (CSB)

Although the Israelites had forfeited His love and mercy by repeatedly breaking His covenant, the Lord still called them “my people.” He refused to turn His back on them. He simply couldn’t. He loved them. They were His covenant people. From them in the fullness of time the promised Messiah would come. But just because He cared for them, He had to bring charges against them, that they might be convicted and in penitence return to Him. (PBC)

WHAT HAVE I DONE...HOW HAVE I BURDENED YOU – The Lord’s questions ironically suggested that possibly He was at fault for Israel’s failures. (TLSB)

6:4-5 The Lord reminded His people of four specific examples of His saving acts: He (1) redeemed them from Egypt; (2) provided excellent leaders; (3) guarded from harm; (4) led them into the Promised Land. (TLSB)

6:5 *Balak ... Balaam.* See Nu 22–24. (CSB)

Balak hired Balaam to curse Israel, but the Lord forced him to bless Israel instead (Nu 22–24). (TLSB)

As the Israelites drew near to their promised homeland, King Balak of Moab tried to harm Israel by hiring the heathen prophet Balaam to curse them. The Lord, however, commanded Balaam to bless the Israelites – four times in fact, and the one time he even proclaimed a Messianic prophecy. (Numbers 22-24). According to His promise to protect His people, the Lord had delivered them from the hands of evil men like Balak and Balaam. (PBC)

Shittim to Gilgal. See Jos 3:1; 4:19. (CSB)

Locations on the eastern and western sides of the Jordan River, which Israel crossed to enter Canaan (Jsh 3:1; 4:19). (TLSB)

Shittim lay east of Jericho, across the Jordan River. It was Israel's last camping place before crossing the Jordan and entering Canaan. Here the people had committed sexual sins with the Moabites and had joined in their idolatry. Although the Lord punished them for these sins, He had not rejected them. When the Israelites had crossed the Jordan River and set up camp at Gilgal, between the Jordan and Jericho, they knew that at last they were home. The Lord had brought His people home, into the Promised Land, just as He had promised. (PBC)

6:1–5 The Lord's indictment of Israel is based on the evidence of His saving acts. Yet by their sins, the people acted as though serving the Lord wearied them. When we think and speak as though God wants to rob us of joy in life, we treat God as our oppressor. We forget His saving acts on our behalf: creation, redemption, and sanctification. The Lord comes to us in His Word, calling us to repentance. The Holy Spirit moves us to confess our sins and trust Jesus for pardon and renewal. • Father, thank You for the love You have shown me in Your Son. By the leading of Your Holy Spirit, may I live each day recalling the great things You have done for me. Amen. (TLSB)

6:6-8 Character of the offerings goes from common to extraordinary to absurd. Some interpreters have argued from this passage that Israelite offerings originally included child sacrifice, commonly practiced by other nations. However, such an interpretation fails to appreciate the prophet's rhetoric. (TLSB)

6:6 The same thought is expressed in 1Sa 15:22; Ps 51:16; Hos 6:6; Isa 1:11–15 (see note there). Micah does not deny the desirability of sacrifices but shows that it does no good to offer them without obedience. (CSB)

WITH WHAT SHALL I COME – In response to the Lord's indictment, an individual asks what the Lord requires. The four questions, in ascending scale of value, refer to some ritual performance. (TLSB)

bow. Synonymous with worship toward God (Ex 4:31; 34:8; Ps 95:6; 1Sm 1:28) or respect and service for a human being (Gn 33:3; 43:26–28; 1Sm 20:41; 28:14; Est 3:2). God expressly forbade bowing to false gods (Ex 20:4–5). People also bowed to (1) greet someone (Gn 18:2; 19:1), (2) signal humility and repentance (Ezr 9:5; 10:1), and (3) express thanks (Gn 24:52). Bows were done in a variety of ways (1Ch 29:20; 1Ki 18:42; Ne 8:6) and likely included tilting the head, tilting the upper body, kneeling with one's face to the ground, or lying prostrate. The more elaborate the bow, the greater the expression of devotion or emotion (cf Gn 33:3). (TLSB p. 1276)

calves a year old? Burnt offering prescribed by God's law (Lv 9:3). (TLSB)

6:7 THOUSANDS OF RAMS – They still thought they could earn God's good will. They were willing to bargain with God as though He were one of their own corrupt judges who could be bribed to overlook their failings. (PBC)

When King Solomon dedicated the temple, countless animals were sacrificed (1Ki 8:5, 63). (TLSB)

rivers of oil? Oil was poured on grain offerings (Lv 2:1). (TLSB)

OFFER MY FIRSTBORN – The sacrifice of children practiced by ancient heathen peoples, especially by the Moabites and the Phoenicians (2 Kings 3:27). Those Israelites like wicked Ahaz (2 Kings 16:3) and godless Manasseh (2 Kings 21:6) who resorted to human sacrifice were following the practice of the heathen. (PBC)

Israel was forbidden to sacrifice children (Dt 18:10), something their heathen neighbors did (2Ki 21:6). (TLSB)

6:8 man. The use of the singular makes the accusation personal, though Micah is speaking to all Israel (see also Dt 10:12–13). (CSB)

Micah directs each individual to the Word, where the Lord tells what He requires. (TLSB)

act justly ... love mercy. The kind of obedience God expects from his covenant people. (CSB)

To be fair and honest. (TLSB)

This can be done when a right relationship is had with God and which has been initiated by God through the sacrifice of his son. The we can act according to God's standards of justice as laid down in his law. Worshipping God alone and not idols, trusting in him alone and not in weapons or in man is acting justly toward God. Acting justly to one's fellowman is showing him no injustice or cruelty in word or deed but treating him like himself. (PBC)

LOVE MERCY – It's God's mercy that had and continues to have for us by forgiving our sins by the unselfish love of Jesus. (PBC)

Hbr *chesed*, emphasizes a love that is loyal and steadfast. (TLSB)

Philippians 2:1-2 "If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion,² then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose.

WALK HUMBLY – Recognize that we bring nothing to God that takes care of our sins. But unless we realize that these requirements of God's law are impossible for the unregenerate to fulfill, we are actually promoting a religion of work-righteousness. Faith gives the reason and gospel gives us the strength to love the Lord our God above all else and our neighbor as ourselves. (PBC)

To be modest and reverential, always conscious of one's dependence on the Lord. Luther: "God requires no good works from us for Himself; He wants everything to yield to the use and welfare

of our neighbor. The glory of such works is enough for God. Faith is the beginning of justification, as all Scripture reveals. Being justified by faith, we neither can nor should offer anything to God other than the sacrifice of praise; that is, that we bear witness with our preaching of the grace we have received, that we magnify God, that we preach His glory, and do this preaching through the Gospel. These are the ‘fruits of our lips,’ Hos. 14:2. Then let us show mercy to our neighbor” (AE 18:261). (TLSB)

Philippians 2:3-4 ³ Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. ⁴ Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.”

6:6–8 The Lord has clearly revealed in His Word what He requires of us. Our problem is not a failure to know but a failure to do. We “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rm 3:23). God showed His steadfast love for us by the sacrifice of His Son on the cross. We are “justified by His grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (Rm 3:24). The Holy Spirit leads redeemed sinners to walk in justice, kindness, and humility. • Lamb of God, You take away the sin of the world. Grant us peace and love toward our neighbors. Amen. (TLSB)

Israel's Guilt and Punishment

⁹ Listen! The LORD is calling to the city— and to fear your name is wisdom— “Heed the rod and the One who appointed it. ¹⁰ Am I still to forget, O wicked house, your ill-gotten treasures and the short ephah, which is accursed? ¹¹ Shall I acquit a man with dishonest scales, with a bag of false weights? ¹² Her rich men are violent; her people are liars and their tongues speak deceitfully. ¹³ Therefore, I have begun to destroy you, to ruin you because of your sins. ¹⁴ You will eat but not be satisfied; your stomach will still be empty. You will store up but save nothing, because what you save I will give to the sword. ¹⁵ You will plant but not harvest; you will press olives but not use the oil on yourselves, you will crush grapes but not drink the wine. ¹⁶ You have observed the statutes of Omri and all the practices of Ahab’s house, and you have followed their traditions. Therefore I will give you over to ruin and your people to derision; you will bear the scorn of the nations. ”

6:9 *city.* Jerusalem. (CSB)

FEAR YOUR NAME – Literally, "Thy name beholds wisdom," that is, it is a matter of true wisdom to fear the name of Jehovah, or, His attention is directed to the true wisdom of life. (Kretzmann)

Micah interjected a word of advice to the people. (TLSB)

Hear. Exhortation of vv 1–2 was repeated because the Lord will again be speaking. (TLSB)

rod. Micah had reminded the people of what the Lord required (v 8). Now they will hear from the Lord how the rod of His punishment will fall on them because they failed to do good. (TLSB)

6:10 ILL-GOTTEN TREASURES – Namely, such as had been gained by wickedness, by oppression and cheating. (Kretzmann)

treasures of wickedness. Money, land, and possessions gained by unjust business practices. (TLSB)

ephah. About half a bushel. (CSB)

scant measure. Deceptively lighter weights (v 11) were used by sellers to cheat buyers. (TLSB)

Namely, such as had been gained by wickedness, by oppression and cheating. (Kretzmann)

IS ACCURSED – "and the ephah of leanness, the accursed," for many of the rich had made their money by short-weighting the people. (Kretzmann)

6:11 See Pr 11:1; 20:23; Hos 12:7; Am 8:5. (CSB)

FALSE WEIGHTS – Merchants tied their own weights to their belts. (TLSB)

6:12 *Her*. Jerusalem's. (CSB)

People grew rich by means of dishonesty, violence, and lies. (TLSB)

grievous blow. The rod of the Lord would strike those who sinfully oppressed the poor and weak. The image refers to drought or blight. (TLSB)

6:14-15 What food they might find would provide little nourishment. When Assyria and Babylon invaded the land, they would follow the practice of conquerors and devastate the land while destroying its produce (Joel 1:5ff; Amos 5:11). Empty stomachs, barren fields, food wantonly destroyed – a horrible famine would stalk the land (Jer 52:6) (PBC)

The Lord inflicted a "futility curse" on the people, which prevented them from ever being satisfied or enjoying the fruits of their labors (Hos 8:7; Am 5:11). Cf Dt 28. (TLSB)

But the famine of their faith was worse. It was clear that they had not been following the commands of the Lord. (PBC)

6:16 *Omri ... Ahab's*. 1Ki 16:25, 30 says that they did more evil than all the kings who preceded them. (CSB)

Father and son, kings of Israel (885–853 BC) whose wickedness became proverbial (1Ki 16:25, 30). (TLSB)

walked in their counsels. Rather than walking humbly with God (v 8), Micah's hearer followed the example of these wicked kings.

you. The Lord probably has the city in mind (v 9). (TLSB)

hissing. Inhabitants of the city would be objects of derisive hissing. (TLSB)

SCORN OF THE NATIONS – The disgrace which is ordinarily heaped upon the people of God if it is delivered into the hands of its enemies. The greater the grace and mercy of the Lord which was upon them, the greater would be their punishment for having rejected His mercy. If people have a form of godliness, but deny its power, then this outward semblance is all the more liable to bring the Lord's reproach upon such hypocrites. (Kretzmann)

6:9–16 God would punish the wickedness of powerful city people. They would be cursed, not blessed, and be derided and condemned. Whoever breaks God's laws, especially by using positions of power to exploit the weak, will ultimately face God's judgment. Our sins may not match all that the Lord here condemns, but none of us is innocent in His sight. To walk humbly with our God means to repent daily of our sins and cling to His grace and mercy in Christ. • Lord Jesus, cleanse me from all evil, and give me strength to care for those who are weak and powerless in our world. Amen. (TLSB)