

God's Anger at Sin

Micah 1:1-2:13

6 December 2020 | Grace Bible Church Corinda | Ben Shannon

Big Question: Is God angry?

Big Idea: God is angry at sin, even if we don't see it.

Introduction

Most of you probably know the hymn, *In Christ Alone*, which we sing from time to time.

*In Christ alone my hope is found;
He is my light, my strength, my song;*

It's a great song, a modern hymn that'll probably become a classic.

In 2013, a denomination in the US – the Presbyterian Church (USA) – wanted to include *In Christ Alone* in their new hymnal.

Except their Committee on Congregational Song wanted to use some slightly different words – changing, “The wrath of God was satisfied,” to “The love of God was magnified.”

You're not allowed to just change someone else's lyrics, so they did the right thing and asked for permission.

The authors of the song said “no” and in the end, the song was dropped from the hymnal.

I think that there are a few reasons why they weren't given permission.

Saying that at the cross, the love of God was magnified probably wasn't one of them.

That's absolutely true, but leaving out God's wrath is dangerous.

The God of the Bible – the God that we serve is angry.

He's angry because of sin.

The idea of God's wrath has become unpopular.

Actually, that's nothing new, it's always been unpopular.

If you go back to the second century, there was a guy named Marcion who wanted to get rid of the wrathful God of the Old Testament and cut out any reference to him in the New as well.

He was declared a heretic.

One of his opponents – a little sarcastically, I think – wrote this about him:

"A better god has been discovered, one who is neither offended nor angry nor inflicts punishment, who has no fire warming up in hell, and no outer

darkness wherein there is shuddering and gnashing of teeth: he is merely kind. Of course he forbids you to sin – but only in writing.”¹

The wrath of God can sometimes be hard for us to get our heads around.

God’s wrath might seem shameful and embarrassing.

Perhaps it might be thought that the less it’s talked about, the better.

An angry God seems like a hard sell when compared to a view of God as a gentle, grandfatherly figure who lets you get away with what you want.

After all, isn’t he meant to be a God of love?

That’s exactly the point.

A God who just lets people get away with stuff isn’t a God of love at all.

A God of love must also be a God of justice.

A God of holy love – like the God we meet on the pages of the Bible – doesn’t just let people get away with injustice.

He deals with injustice rather than overlooking it.

Anything less downgrades him from being a God of love and underestimates the horrible power of sin.

We want to make a God who looks like us.

It’s comfortable and attractive for us because it means that we can go merrily along without our sin needing to be dealt with.

But Micah’s prophecies don’t let us off that easily.

They show us that God cares about justice.

Series Outline

In the lead up to Christmas, we’re going to be looking at another one of the minor prophets in the Old Testament.

There are fourteen men named Micah in the Old Testament, but only one of them has a book in the Bible filled with his prophecies.

His ministry came quite a long time before Haggai’s and overlapped with Isaiah’s.

We’ve got a fairly good idea of when Micah was ministering because verse one tells us that God’s word came to him during the reign of three kings of Judah.

After King Solomon, the one nation of Israel divides up into two kingdoms in about 922 BC.

There was the kingdom of Israel – sometimes called Ephraim – in the north with one line of kings.

And the kingdom of Judah in the south with another line of kings.

Jotham (742-735 BC) began ruling at the same time as his father and he was a so-so king.

Ahaz (735-715 BC) who was a bad king, so he gets a thumbs down.

And finally Hezekiah (715-687 BC), who was a very good king... in part due to Micah's preaching!²

Micah's message is for Israel – the northern kingdom with its capital Samaria.

As well as for the southern kingdom with its capital Jerusalem.

AND it was also meant for all of the other nations of the world.

In other words, it was a message for everyone!

In Haggai's time, after they returned from exile, the big and pressing problem was food security.

In Micah's time, the problem was political and military.

The Assyrian Empire was in its early days, although they were becoming a threat as they started to grow in strength.

Both Jewish kingdoms were trying to work out how they'd protect themselves.

You might remember the prophet Jonah.

It comes immediately before Micah.

Jonah was sent to Nineveh, the capital of Assyria.

He was upset that many of them repented, but it didn't last for long and now the Assyrians are very much still enemies.

The real problem though is a lack of trust in God and a failure to be like him.

Micah's name is really the key to the whole book.

Micah means, "Who is like the LORD."

No other god or person is like the God of the Bible.

Yahweh cares about justice, mercy and civic godliness.

Micah's big challenge for us is: Are you like the Lord?

When the world's threatening you, do you respond with justice and mercy?

Do you? Or do you respond by looking out for yourself?

Who is like our God?

You mightn't be surprised to find that God's people aren't like God at all.

But they couldn't see it and so God sent Micah to deliver the cheery news, another warning that God's going to judge them for their own injustice.

Outline

This week, we're going to be looking at the first two chapters.

We'll see that **God is angry at sin, even if we don't see it.**

- God will Judge Sin (1:2-16)
- We are Deceived by Sin (2:1-11)
- God will Deliver Us from Sin (2:12-13)

God will Judge Sin (1:2-16)

"Listen up, folks," Micah says, "because I've got a word for you from the Lord."

This's a public service announcement designed for the people of Judah, the people of Israel and really for everyone in the whole earth.

Every single person who's got a pulse – regardless of where they live or where they come from – needs to hear this.

God's the king over all the earth and every single person in it.

He's the Sovereign LORD, which makes the God of the Bible different from many of the other gods in the world.

Most of them are content to take what they can get – just a small group of people who worship them.

The True and Living God is the God of the whole world, in fact, the whole universe.

That's a bold claim, isn't it?

It would be more than just a little arrogant if he didn't create the whole world and everyone who lives in it.

The world is his, which means he has the right to hold everyone and everything accountable.

It doesn't matter whether you align yourself with him or with one of the other gods in the world (including yourself).

He will hold you accountable and judge you fair and square.

Not only is he going to judge, but he's also going to be in the witness box giving evidence.

Which's going to be a bit of a problem if you've got something to hide. And we all have.

God's not like Mum and Dad – you can't hope that you'll get away with something, hoping that he won't see.

The outlook isn't good when God testifies against us.

In verse three, Micah describes what it's going to be like when King Yahweh leaves his palace and comes down to earth to judge.

He won't skip along the mountains, they'll be decimated as they melt under his feet like running wax near a fire.

The mountains – or high places – are where the pagan idols were usually worshipped.

And the valleys will be split apart by a deluge.

Why's God doing to judge, though?

It's because of this people's sin and transgression, verse five.

They were guilty of making a designer god and worshipping him in the wrong place – Samaria rather than Jerusalem.

That said, things aren't much better in Jerusalem itself where they're also more interested in worshipping idols than in the temple.

Make no mistake, God's buttons are well and truly pressed, his anger is stoked.

One of the reasons we might struggle with God's anger is that we think it's like ours – fast, unreasonable and often irrational.

Who'd want to worship a God who's angry and unpredictable?

Well, that's exactly the kind of god that over 1.8 billion people – or a quarter of the world's population – who belong to a major religion believe in.

But that's not the God of the Bible.

His anger is measured, controlled and appropriate.

He never gets upset over nothing.

He gets upset over sin – wrongdoing, injustice and rebellion.

Sin's the reason that Samaria isn't safe.

Sin is why God's going to turn it into a heap of rubble that's only useful for planting grapes.

Verse seven is incredibly confronting as Micah describes how the idols that they've been worshipping will be broken into pieces and all of the sacrifices are going to be burned with fire.

He'll destroy what they have because it was gained through prostitution.

The Assyrians are about to come in and take the lot.

What are they going to do with it?

Their punishment, the logical consequence, is that they'll spend it in exactly the same way it was earned.

When the people of Judah heard this, they probably wanted to get out the poms and start cheering.

But not so fast because the people of Jerusalem are infected with the same blight.

Their hearts were far from God too.

The incurable lurgy of idolatry's spread down to Judah, all the way up to the gates of Jerusalem itself.

There's a second oracle in verses eight to sixteen that describes what judgment will be like for Judah.

This oracle, which likely came decades after the first, is a warning to Judah that they're going to be next.

Micah's clearly upset by the prospect because he starts going around barefoot and naked.

That doesn't mean he's starkers with no duds on, but that he didn't wear his outer garment as a sign of mourning.

He'll cry like a jackal and mourn like an ostrich.

I don't know what either of those animals sound like, but both are used elsewhere in the Bible to describe ruin.³

In this state of distress, Micah starts to tour south-west Judah.

His travel agent billed it as a judgment tour.

When international travel resumes, I imagine you'll all be lining up to do a judgement tour of Israel?

Not so much? Didn't think so.

I'm not sure it would've been any more popular in Micah's day.

We can't be sure of exactly why he speaks to these particular towns, or exactly where all of them are, for that matter.

They seem to be on the hit list because of their names and history though.

Let me see if I can give you a few examples.

The deaths of Saul and Jonathan weren't meant to be proclaimed in Gath, mentioned in verse ten, in case their enemies heard and rejoiced.⁴

Beth-le-aphrah (also in verse ten) means house of dust. Rolling in dust was a sign of lament.

Zaanan means "exit" and people will be escorted out of the land, exiting due to God's judgment.

The God of the earth is going to judge his people for their idolatry.

Make no mistake, God will judge sin.

That's the warning that Micah came to give.

It's not a very popular message, but it's an important one.

I wonder whether you really believe that God will judge you for your idolatry and sin?

Or – like I far too often do – do you mistake God's patience with you for inability or a lack of care?

God is angry at sin and he will judge us for it.

The big question for us, then, is whether we'll be able to escape.

We are Deceived by Sin (2:1-11)

That's not an easy question to answer because as we're about to see, things will get worse before they get better.

We don't even understand just how powerful and dangerous sin is because we're deceived by it.

God's angry at sin and we're deceived by it.

Micah shows this by starting to call out injustice in his next oracle.

He's particularly concerned with the injustice of coveting.

Coveting is earnestly desiring something that belongs to someone else.

Their self-seeking desire for other people's stuff has put them on a collision course with destruction.

Micah sets his sights on powerful people who use their position to get more stuff from others.

He accuses them of lying in bed at night making plans.

Not that there's anything wrong with strategizing, as such, but they're planning evil.
They're plotting how to trick people out of their land and houses.

Then they can't wait for the daylight to break so that they can put their plans into action.
This's worse than just making the most from a situation because it's premeditated.
They basically do it because they can.

Whether it's through legal means or not, they're doing their best to trample on others to get ahead.

It's fraud and robbery according to verse two, both great injustices.

That's not the way that they'd see it though.

They're just expanding their portfolio, doing a little bit of business.

They probably don't even realise that they're breaking one of the ten commandments.

God owns all the land in Israel and he gave it to families as an inheritance forever and to take that land is sin.

God's got a plan for those who are plotting other people's disaster.

He's going to bring justice on these land-grabbers who'll lose their property to even greater land grabbers.

Their paddocks will go to the apostate Assyrians.

And there's absolutely nothing that they can do to escape or save themselves.

They'll go from being top dogs to the bottom of the heap, verse four.

Holding their heads up proudly will be a thing of the past, gone with their money and position.

Instead, they'll be ridiculed and taunted by their captors.

God also warns that they'll not be part of the people he'll restore and bring home from exile.

They didn't realise what they were doing until it was too late because they were deceived by their sin.

That's exactly what sin does.

It's always deceiving you into believing that it's not a big deal.

Injustice happens when right and wrong get thrown out in favour of my own goals.

When I impose my will on others to get what I want and make my dreams come true.

Coveting is a huge issue, even though we don't talk about it much.

Definitely one of those sins that's much harder to see in the mirror than it is in others.

A key sign is advertising and the way that we live beyond our means to get the stuff they're selling us.

Or spending the early hours of the morning trying to work out how to squeeze the most out of the stock market.

Only rarely do we think of how it's going to affect others.

It's dead easy to fall into the trap of feeding the me monster, but Paul encourages Timothy to take a different tact:

1 Timothy 6:6–9 NIV11 ⁶ But godliness with contentment is great gain. ⁷ For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. ⁸ But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. ⁹ Those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction.

How will the people respond to Micah's prophesy?

"Don't prophesy!" they say to Micah, "You don't know what you're talking about."

Not because they don't think what he's got to say is true, but because they're afraid that it is.

They don't want him to open his big mouth because they're worried that somehow he's going to ruin things for them.

Which has at least two things wrong with it: that God will somehow be influenced by superstitious speaking out loud and that they don't really care about truth.

They want him to stop, so they double down by insisting that not only is there nothing wrong, but Micah's carrying on like a dripping tap who's just out to annoy them.

Micah replies in kind.

"It's actually YOUR prophets who are like a dripping tap.

They say, "You must be wrong. How could God possibly be upset with us?"

"He wouldn't be angry with us, his people!"

"We've got the covenant. We've got God's promises.

"God's not an angry God," they say, "He's the God who revealed himself to Moses as being compassionate:

Exodus 34:6 NIV11 ⁶ And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, "The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness,

Micah's reply is, "Yes, but".

If you think that, then you've only got some of the puzzle pieces and you're not seeing the full picture.

God's covenant blessings are based on obedience.

There are limits to his patience. Don't assume that he'll go soft on your sin to keep his promises.

They're overly optimistic because they don't recognise the weight of their own sin.

This treats God like Santa Claus, who only looks at the good and ignores the bad.

It's difficult to know exactly who's speaking throughout this section.

What clear is that Micah tries to explain just how important his words are.

If he doesn't preach judgment, they'll keep on their merry way, not even realising that they're on a path to condemnation.

Micah replies in the second half of verse seven that God's words do good for the upright.

The problem is that they're acting like enemies of God, verse eight.

They're not being just when they're even willing to take the clothes off someone's back without a second thought, stripping their fellow countrymen like an army returning from war.

God's law made room for compassion for the vulnerable because God's concerned for them.

It's very specific in providing for widows and orphans and says that you should refuse to keep a person's cloak overnight so that they won't freeze.⁵

When they see people doing it tough, rather than seeing an opportunity to help, they see a chance to kick them while they're down.

We've got a word for that – it's exploitation.

Rather than using their wealth to help, they buy up the land cheap and then serve an eviction notice.

They'll kicked women out of their homes, leaving them destitute, with no honour and with nothing to pass onto their children.

They're thieving the blessing that God has given to them forever.

Make no mistake, God's going to tell them to get out.

If they're going to act so unjustly – taking away the security of others – then God will take their security away.

God's land won't be a resting place anymore.

This is another warning that he'll give them the boot and send them out into exile.

Wow. After such cutting remarks, you'd kind of be expecting them to fall to their knees and repent.

That's not what they do at all.

Instead, they look for someone who'll affirm them in their position.

That's what we often do, isn't it?

We go from person to person until we find someone who'll tell us what we want to hear.

They want to live in an echo chamber of yes people.

True prophets don't lie, but they'll find a so-called prophet who'll tell them what they want to hear.

They're so self-deluded and they'll grab hold of whatever drivel from some wind-bag who'll support their position.

They come across a prophet who tells them, "It's okay.

"You're going to experience the good life – plenty of wine and beer to make you happy."

The point isn't that there's anything wrong with beer or wine, but it just isn't true that everything's going to be okay.

These prophets are hiding the truth from them and allowing them to continue in their self-deception.

Verse eleven:

Micah 2:11 NIV11 ¹¹ If a liar and deceiver comes and says, 'I will prophesy for you plenty of wine and beer,' that would be just the prophet for this people!

We need a healthy fear of sin, not just a "she'll be right" attitude.

And a healthy expectation that we might be self-deceived because it's so easy for us to be deceived by sin.

It's possible to be so blind to your sin that you don't even realise it.

That's why we need God's word, just like Micah provided.

God's word gives us a perspective that we can't see for ourselves.

That's the thing with self-deception, you can't see it!

God's perspective though, it's always right, and it shows us what we're really like.

Do you read God's word because it's a chore that you've got to do?

There can be times when we're all like that.

But opening it to be given a reality check is something that we should all be looking for.

Yes, I know that it often feels like ignorance is bliss.

But what you don't know CAN hurt you.

If you're not in God's word regularly, you're missing out on one of his greatest blessings.

That's the spiritual insight to see where you're self-deceived in your sin.

We need to be aware that sin is deceptive and we can be blind in our understanding.

Sin isn't something to be played with, but something to be warned of.

God will Deliver Us from Sin (2:12-13)

After some strong warnings and heavy going, there's light at the end of the tunnel in the last two verses.

There's hope in what God's going to do.

Yes, God's going to punish them for their sin but that doesn't mean he's given up on them completely.

Even though they're going to be sent into exile, he's also going to gather them back together again.

Once God's stripped away the naughty people, there will only be a remnant left.

Not a lot, but a small group of survivors he'll protect, like sheep in a pen.

God will be their shepherd and bring them together, gathering them behind the walls of their exilic prison.

Micah 2:12 NIV11 ¹² "I will surely gather all of you, Jacob; I will surely bring together the remnant of Israel. I will bring them together like sheep in a pen, like a flock in its pasture; the place will throng with people.

He'll keep his promises to this group that they'll survive his judgment and bring them home.

God's going to send one who'll break open the way.

It's quite a strong and graphic picture – busting them out by kicking down the gate that's holding them.

He's going to bust open the gate.

He talks about "The One" in verse thirteen.

Who is The One? Is it Neo?

No, it's King Yahweh's who's going to lead the charge in setting them free.

He's the one who'll lead his people out of the predicament they're in.

God himself is the one who will break them out and deliver them from their bondage to sin.

Micah's telling them to look forward to the future and the coming of The One.

Who is Jesus, the second person of the Godhead.

At Christmas, we remember that God came down.

Instead of smashing the mountains and valleys, the God of the universe was born as a humble baby.

As he grew up, John the Baptist had a ministry to prepare the way for the Lord.

He seemed to expect that God was going to bring judgment.

That's why he called people to repent.

When the Pharisees come out to see him,

Matthew 3:7b NIV11 he said to them: "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath?"

God is rightly angry at sin and he can't let that sin go unpunished.

Jesus came so that God could expend his wrath at sin.

At the cross, God's wrath was satisfied by coming down on Jesus.

The full force of God's anger landed on him instead of us.

As Isaiah puts it:

Isaiah 53:4–5 NIV11 ⁴ Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted. ⁵ But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed.

Jesus died as a substitute for sinners.

In Jesus, God has delivered us from sin so that we can have peace with God.

Put your hope and trust in him alone and you can escape God's wrath.

By his wounds, people like you and I can be healed.

God came to deliver us from our sin.

Conclusion

God is angry, he's angry at sin just as he should be.

We mustn't miss how serious our sin is and how grave his judgment will be.

Yet our sin is worse than we can imagine or understand and often we can't even see the injustices that we commit against others.

That doesn't make us any less guilty and so our sin needs to be dealt with.

God has done that in Jesus.

If the wrath of God hadn't been satisfied in the cross of Christ, then the love of God wouldn't have been magnified by it.

In fact, you can't see the greatness of God's love unless you understand his anger poured out on Jesus.

God's wrath isn't something to be embarrassed by, it's a reason to praise him for taking on the wrath our sin deserves!

¹ Tertullian, *Against Marcion* 1.27

² Jeremiah 26:18-19.

³ Isaiah 34:13; Jeremiah 50:39.

⁴ 2 Samuel 1:20.

⁵ Exodus 22:26-27