Micah 7 *Preach to Yourself: When the Headlines Make you Cringe*

***A Year Like No Other***You have probably seen the advertisement. It’s pretty clever: Satan is looking at a dating app. And he makes a possible connection. He’s almost bashful as he waits in Central Park and asks the young lady: “Are you username 2-0-2-0?” “Please,” she says, “call me 2020.” And then they’re off. A whole montage of the two picnicking in an empty stadium, stealing toilet paper, eating hot peppers. The point is not subtle: Satan and the year 2020 were made for each other.

We’ve all made the joke, and we’ve all observed that the last year has been about as bad as any year ever. We say it’s a year like no other.

But I started wondering about that. Couldn’t we say that just about any year is a year like no other? That is to say, if you pick any year in history, you can find some pretty frightening headlines. So that’s what I did. I picked a year, not quite at random. **1972.** I picked that year because that is the year of my birth. And, as it turns out, 1972 was a year Satan might have been interested in dating as well.

1972, like 2020, was an election year in the U.S. The incumbent President, Richard Nixon, won a pretty decisive victory over South Dakota Senator George McGovern. But the election was marred in a couple of ways. During the primary season the controversial governor of Alabama, George Wallace, running for the Democratic nomination, was shot three times while campaigning in Maryland. He actually won two state primaries the next day, but was paralyzed below the waist and eventually faded from contention.

The other controversy was more slow-developing. In the summer it was reported that there had been a break-in at the Democratic National Committee’s headquarters—at the Watergate hotel. Over time, it became apparent that listening devices had been planted there by people connected to the committee to re-elect the President. It took two years, but eventually the release of the “Watergate tapes” made it clear that Nixon was aware of the shenanigans and in 1974 he become the only U.S. President to resign before the end of his term.

1972, like many of the years before it, was also filled with news from Vietnam. In July, the actress Jane Fonda stirred controversy by touring North Vietnam and allowing herself to be photographed with a North Vietnamese anti-aircraft gun. By the end of the year, all U.S. ground troops were withdrawn from Vietnam, but that didn’t mean the end of the war. In December, the U.S. conducted the Christmas bombings, the largest heavy bomber strikes launched by the [U.S. Air Force](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Air_Force) since the end of [World War II](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_War_II).

Internationally, 1972 was one of the worst years for what is known as “the Troubles” in Northern Ireland. On January 30, British Paratroopers indiscriminately opened fire on a group of protestors marching for independence. 13 people were killed and 17 more wounded on what is known as “Bloody Sunday.” In July, “Bloody Friday” took place, when the IRA (the Irish Republican Army) retaliated by setting off 22 bombs in a span of 80 minutes. 9 were killed and 130 injured. Altogether, the IRA is believed to have carried out 1300 bombings in 1972 alone.

And then there were the Olympics. The summer Olympics were held in Munich, Germany and they were marked by terror. On September 5, a group of Palestinian terrorists stormed the Olympic Village apartment of Israeli athletes, killing two and taking nine others hostage. The terrorists were part of a group known as Black September. In return for the release of the hostages, they demanded that [Israel](https://www.history.com/topics/history-of-israel) release over 230 Arab prisoners being held in Israeli jails. In an ensuing shootout at the Munich airport, the nine Israeli hostages were killed along with five terrorists and one West German policeman.

I could go on. On May 21, my birthday, a man attacked Michelangelo’s *Pieta* statue with a hammer while claiming to be Jesus. On February 26, a coal sludge spill in Buffalo Creek, West Virginian killed 125 people. On October 12, a racially-motivated brawl broke out on the *USS Kitty Hawk*, an aircraft carrier, leaving 50 sailors injured. It seems like 1972 could have been Satan’s girlfriend as well.

My point is not to measure one year against another as much as it is to remind us that there is always bad news. We live in a fallen world. Human society is marred by sin. As such, there are always going to be national and world events that worry us. There are always going to be headlines that make us cringe.

The question is: **What do we preach to ourselves when the news is bad?** When current events are discouraging, when society appears to be pulling apart at the seams, when things are spiraling out of control, what is the message we need to remind ourselves of?

My text today is Micah 7. In this passage, Micah reflects on the headlines of his day, and it’s not good. But then he remembers God. He places his hope in God. And he finds three truths he can preach to himself in spite of the bad news.

***Cynical and Disillusioned***Let’s look at the text. We’ll start with **Micah’s misery. Micah 7, verse 1:**

What misery is mine!
I am like one who gathers summer fruit
    at the gleaning of the vineyard;
there is no cluster of grapes to eat,
    none of the early figs that I crave.

Micah tells us that he is miserable. This is a lament. He’s pouring out his frustrations and anger toward God.

He draws an analogy. He says he feels like somebody who has gone out to the vineyard at the end of the harvest. He’s anticipating juicy, sweet fruit; but he has found nothing there. The harvesters have already been through; and they’ve swept everything clean. There are no grapes to eat, none of the figs that he has been craving.

What’s the cause of him feeling this way? **Verses 2 and 3:**

**2**The faithful have been swept from the land;
    not one upright person remains.
Everyone lies in wait to shed blood;
    they hunt each other with nets.
**3**Both hands are skilled in doing evil;
    the ruler demands gifts,
the judge accepts bribes,
    the powerful dictate what they desire—
    they all conspire together.

Let me tell you a little about Micah. Micah was a prophet. When we hear that word, “prophet,” we often think of future-telling. We think of the predictions in the Old Testament that point to Jesus. We often think a prophet’s job was to see the future. And they did, to a certain extent.

But a prophet’s primary job was to share God’s message for the moment. It wasn’t future-telling as much as it was truth-telling. As such, prophets were often social critics. It was their job to let the people know when they were straying from God’s will.

And that was especially true of Micah. Micah was a prophet to Judah during the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah. This was about a century before the Babylonian invasion. It was a period of gradual decline; a time when people were losing more and more of their identity as God’s chosen people.

Micah’s job is to call out these failures of the people. Some of the sins that Micah addresses are an increase in violence; greed; and corruption. You can see that in these verses. There is a sense that no one remains faithful to God anymore. Instead, citizens are acting with violence toward one another. And the leaders, the rulers and judges that are supposed to be setting the right example, are the worst of the lot. They demand gifts and accept bribes and conspire to do evil.

You can find this sort of thing throughout the book of Micah. Just one example: in **chapter 3:1-3** he says this about Judah’s leaders:

“Listen, you leaders of Jacob,
    you rulers of Israel.
Should you not embrace justice,
**2**    you who hate good and love evil;
who tear the skin from my people
    and the flesh from their bones;
**3**who eat my people’s flesh,
    strip off their skin
    and break their bones in pieces;
who chop them up like meat for the pan,
    like flesh for the pot?”

If you’ve ever complained that all our leaders today seem crooked and corrupt, you’ve probably never said it quite as harshly as this! He’s picturing the politicians and rulers of the day as cannibals sitting around stew pots dining on their own people. Micah is becoming cynical and jaded. He’s completely disillusioned by the evidence of a broken-down society he sees all around him. Back to **chapter 7, verse 4:**

**4**The best of them is like a brier,
    the most upright worse than a thorn hedge.
The day God visits you has come,
    the day your watchmen sound the alarm.
    Now is the time of your confusion.

Even the best of the lot are as crooked and sharp as a brier patch. Even the most upright are as likely to scratch and tear all who pass by.

Even worse, the breakdown of society is beginning to fracture relationships. **Verses 5 and 6:**

**5**Do not trust a neighbor;
    put no confidence in a friend.
Even with the woman who lies in your embrace
    guard the words of your lips.
**6**For a son dishonors his father,
    a daughter rises up against her mother,
a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law—
    a man’s enemies are the members of his own household.

We’ve seen this in our day too. The more controversy there is in the news, the harder we find it to talk about with people we care about. Everybody has an opinion. Everybody takes a side. Suddenly holiday meals are filled with tension and friendships fracture. It’s a sad day when a man’s enemies are the members of his own household.

This is what made Micah miserable. We don’t know all the historic details. The specific headlines have been lost to us. But we can surely relate. His lament could be written about today. When the news cycle is filled with controversy after controversy; when our leaders seem more likely to add to our problems than to lessen them; when our own dinner tables become places of heated debate: it’s hard not to feel miserable.

***But as for me…***Which leads to the **“Yet I…”** of the passage.

If you are just joining this series, the passages we are looking at all contain a crucial moment that I am calling the “Yet I…” moment. This is where the Biblical author gets his own attention—stops his reflection on his painful situation—and reminds himself that God’s part of the story is yet to be told. I call it the “Yet I…” because in several of the passages that’s the phrase that is used. “What misery is mine… Yet I will remember this…”

Here in Micah, the “Yet I” is in **verse 7:**

**7**But as for me, I watch in hope for the Lord,
    I wait for God my Savior;
    my God will hear me.

This is one of my favorite “Yet I…” statements in the Bible. It doesn’t use the exact phrase, but what it does use is just so gritty. So tough. “But as for me…” “But as for me…”

Micah says: There’s nobody godly left in the land. People are preying on one another, lying in wait to shed blood. The leaders and rules are corrupt and taking bribes. The members of my own household can’t be trusted. All of society appears to be falling apart. Everybody else has forgotten about God…

but as for me, I am going to watch in hope for the Lord.
but as for me, I will wait for God my Savior.
but as for me, I believe my God will still hear me.

Micah’s situation is miserable. The stories being told are bad. Real bad. But Micah knows that there is still more story to be told. Micah knows that God is yet to be heard from. And so, he is going to preach to himself.

The rest of chapter 7 then is more of the future-telling type of prophecy. The first part was truth-telling, calling out the sins of society. But now Micah begins to look ahead. He’s going to talk about “that day.” In the prophets, it is common to look ahead to “the day of the Lord.” It’s a prophetic reference to a coming day of judgment and restoration when God will be heard from and all will be set right. This is what Micah resolves to put his hope in. This is what Micah is willing to wait for.

There are three reasons Micah trusts in God to be his savior:

***In that Day***First, **God will rebuild His People.** Micah looks forward to the day when God’s covenant people will be vindicated.

I’m not going to take us through every verse in the rest of the chapter, but just grab a few key ones to illuminate the main points. In verses 8 through 10 Micah alludes to the coming destruction of Jerusalem. He is one of many prophets who could see that Judah’s current trajectory was leading to God’s righteous judgment. He anticipates a day when Judah’s enemies will ask sarcastically “Where is the LORD your God?” (v. 10)

But then, he looks beyond that tragedy to a new day. **Verses 11 and 12:**

**11**The day for building your walls will come,
    the day for extending your boundaries.
**12**In that day people will come to you
    from Assyria and the cities of Egypt,
even from Egypt to the Euphrates
    and from sea to sea
    and from mountain to mountain.

You can see the threefold repetition: “the day…the day…in that day.” A new day is coming when those who mock God will be silenced.

The emphasis, first of all, is on the rebuilding of the walls. For an ancient city, solid walls were the difference between strength and weakness. Walls were the difference between viability as a city or just another deserted ghost town. On the one hand, this is a prediction of the rebuilding that would take place under Nehemiah. But, on the other hand, the walls are being used here as a symbol of being restored to God’s favor and salvation.

The people of God may be headed for judgment, but they will not be down forever. Just because their enemies will gloat for a time; that does not mean God will have abandoned them.

In fact, Micah anticipates not just a restoration; but an actual expansion of boundaries. God’s people will grow and take on new territory. They will be stronger and more numerous than ever before. In that day, people from Assyria and Egypt and elsewhere will actually be drawn to the people of God. In other words, people who are not ethnically Jewish, people who are Gentiles, people like you and me, are going to come and join the people of God.

Micah is actually anticipating here something that the people of his day could scarcely fathom. What Micah is talking about is the existence of the Church—a transnational, transethnic, group of people who are joined together not by geographic proximity or bloodlines—but by loyalty to God and identity in Jesus Christ. Micah is looking forward to a day when God’s people will be built up into a worldwide movement.

I think there is something encouraging here for us, especially as we navigate the ups and downs of the news cycle. We, of course, are part of the fulfillment of this verse. We are a part of that worldwide collection of believers known as the church. And so it is good for us to remember that our standing in the world does not depend on whether the nation state we live in is a super power or just another of the pack. It is good to remember that our value to God does not hang on whether our preferred political party is in power or not. Those things can be important. But ultimately God’s promises are not about building earthly power but about building His kingdom; a kingdom where His values and rules take priority.

Second, **God will resume His wondrous deeds.** Micah commits himself, and his people, to the care of the Great Shepherd. **Verses 14-15:**

**14**Shepherd your people with your staff,
    the flock of your inheritance,
which lives by itself in a forest,
    in fertile pasturelands.
Let them feed in Bashan and Gilead
    as in days long ago.
**15**“As in the days when you came out of Egypt,
    I will show them my wonders.”

These verses remind us of God’s tender care. The shepherd metaphor is one of the Bible’s favorites for God. At times, shepherds in the Bible will be pictured as fierce warriors, like David taking on the lion and the bear to protect his father’s flock. But usually, the shepherd metaphor emphasizes gentle and wise nurturing. These verses sound similar to the shepherd Psalm, Psalm 23, where the LORD leads his sheep beside the quiet waters and makes them lie down in green pastures. As the Psalm says: “Your rod and your staff, they comfort me.” (Psalm 23:4)

More than that, the expression “the flock of your inheritance” reminds God’s people of how precious they are to Him. These are the people He has chosen. The people He has made covenant with. They are His special possession (cf. Ex. 19:5-6).

If we think of verse 14 as a prayer, where the prophet is inviting God to shepherd his people; then we can think of verse 15 as God’s answer. And His answer is “YES!” Yes, He emphatically will shepherd His people. He will intervene on their behalf just as He did when He took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt.

Behind the word for “wonders” is the same Hebrew word that is used for one of the names for the coming Messiah in Isaiah 9:6: “His name shall be called Wonderful Counselor.” The awesome and breathtaking splendor of this power had been demonstrated in the plagues of Egypt and the miracles at the Red Sea and along the wilderness journey. Now, God will once again show Himself mighty in the building of His new people.

Again, for those of us who live on this side of history it is hard not to see references to the Church and Jesus Christ in these verses. He, of course, is the one who identified Himself as “the Good Shepherd” who “lays down His life for the sheep.” He is the one who did signs and wonders to confirm His identity as the Son of God. And His greatest sign, His most wonderful deed, was when He died on the cross and then defeated the grave in order to lead us on an Exodus out of our sin.

Which leads to the third thing Micah preaches to himself: **God will remove our sins.** Micah concludes with an anthem of praise. **Verses 18 and 19:**

**18**Who is a God like you,
    who pardons sin and forgives the transgression
    of the remnant of his inheritance?
You do not stay angry forever
    but delight to show mercy.
**19**You will again have compassion on us;
    you will tread our sins underfoot
    and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea.

This is one of the great descriptions of God in all of scripture. These are verses which deserve to be better known today then they are. I would encourage you to spend some time with these verses this week. They are worth adding to your rolodex of memorized scriptures.

Verse 18 begins with a rhetorical question: “Who is a God like you?” This is actually a play on words. The name Micah translates as “Who is like Yahweh?” In a sense, the whole book has been asking this question, but now, at the end, Micah is going to answer it definitely.

And the obvious answer is: No one is like our God. There is no one that even comes close to measuring up to who God is and to what He has done.

Why then, are we so intrigued by all the enticing sins of the time? Why do we get so caught up in the headlines and the disasters of the moment? Why do we worry so much about the outcome of this election or that court case when ultimately they are going to be the briefest footnotes in history? Shouldn’t we, instead, be encouraged by all the promises of God, if He so far exceeds every one else?

Not only is our God incomparably great, but with that greatness He will condescend in pardoning sin and forgiving transgression. The reference here is to the Passover night. The word translated as “pardon” means to literally “lift up” and refers to God lifting the burden of sin off the shoulders of His people. The word translated “forgive” comes from the Hebrew word “pass over” and is a reference to the paschal lamb that became the substitute for sin and thus was able to offer full release for them.

God does not stay angry forever, but delights to show mercy. Once again, the word here is the great Hebrew word “*hesed*”. God delights in grace, loving-kindness and mercy. He does not delight in holding a grudge, or in bottling up His anger over our sins. He longs to forgive and separate us from our sins by hurling them into the depths of the sea. Just as Pharaoh’s chariots were covered over by the raging waters, so God will tread down and cast aside all that threatens to separate us from Him.

What a wonderful and gracious Savior, who removes our sin and guilt and freely gives us His joy and satisfaction despite all the grief we have given Him.

Finally, these verses at the end of Micah play an important role in the annual observance of faithful Jews. Every year, on Ros Hashanah, the Jewish New Year, Jews are encouraged to go to a stream or river and fill their pockets with stones. Then they take these stones, representing their sins, and throw them one by one into the water while reciting these verses.

This is known as the *Taslich*, for the words “you will hurl” or “you will cast.” It symbolizes the fact that God can and will take our sins, wash them down the streams of running water and bury them deep in the depths of the ocean. Once He forgives our sins, He remembers them against us no more.

These are the great truths we need to remember. When the news cycle is wearing on us, when the relentless barrage of bad news keeps beating against our hearts and minds; we need to ask ourselves: “Who is like our God?”

Who else can build a people that crosses borders and bloodlines? Who else can shepherd His flock with wondrous deeds? Who else takes our sins and throws them into the depths of the sea?

The world is filled with miserable news; but as for me…I will watch in hope for the Lord.