The Social Role of Worship: A Reading of Micah 6:1-8

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THE SOCIAL ROLE OF WORSHIP: A READING OF MICAH 6:1-8

by

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ABSTRACT

This study addresses the problem of dichotomy between worship and social ethics in the life of God’s people then and now. It also stresses how the essence and purpose of worship has been spoiled and thereby the testimonies of the God’s people have been weakened as a result of living a life of complexities. The research method employed in this study is a holistic exegetical approach such as syntactical/grammatical, literary, theological and historical aspects.

The main focus of this study is Micah 6:1-8. It powerfully tackles the importance of the social role of worship and furthermore teaches the need to balance between worship in the cultic life and social life. In order to grasp the profound nature and meaning of worship, this work first examines the Old Testament understanding of worship especially in the Torah. Thereafter, it goes on to the exegetical study of the chosen passage in details in its historical context where God’s people misunderstood the nature of worship by dichotomizing worship and social ethics, and draws a conclusion regarding its theological message.

The later part of this study includes a very brief examination of the history of the Chin Christian Community and their misunderstanding of worship and the effects that caused. Finally, this study concludes with the challenges for the Chin Christian Community that is still very much in need of discovering the social role that is entailed in biblical worship with the hope of building and creating a better worshiping community that is to be a benefit to a wider community.
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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CBQ Catholic Biblical Quarterly
ICC International Critical Commentary
JBL Journal of Biblical Literature
JBPR Journal of Biblical and Pneumatological Research
JSOT Journal for the Study of Old Testament
NAC New American Commentary
NIDOTEx New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis.
SwJT Southwestern Journal of Theology
TDOT Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament. Edited by G. J. Botterweck
and H. Ringgren. Translated by J. T. Willis, G. W. Bromiley, and D. E.
TLOT Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament. Edited by E. Jenni, with
assistance from C. Westermann. Translated by M. E. Biddle. 3 vols.
TWOT Theological Workbook of the Old Testament
TynBul Tyndale Bulletin
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Background of the Research Problem

Throughout the history of religions, “traditionalists tell us that worship has never been absent in a human community. It is a universal human phenomenon and its origin can be traced back to the beginning of mankind and creation.”¹ Thus, it is undeniably true that worship has been a part of human life at all times and plays an essential role in the course of humanity regardless of differences in religions, denominations, races, colors, genders, statuses, etc. In fact, the whole chapter of Genesis 1-2, the creation account, speaks of “a liturgy of creation and worship has always been part of the divine plan for his creation.”²

As for Christians, a picture that may come to mind whenever we talk about worship is Christians gathering in the Church at a designated place. In fact, it is in this place that Christians gather together as one family and worship God. Sadly, this worship also is a matter that causes unnecessary splits and divisions within churches, especially among Chin Christian Community today. More often, it is because of the limitation in our view of worship. Churches have been competing in our ideas of spirituality and practice of worship. We seem to pay more attention and are drawn so much in to what kind of


² Carol J. Dempsey, Hope amid the Ruins: The Ethics of Israel’s Prophets (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2000), 107.
worship style we like, so that we become less attentive about the meaning and purpose of worship, and the kind of worship that God seeks and desires in the lives of his people.

Another issue we have is our traditionally common identification of worship as certain cultic activities (offering sacrifices, tithing, thanksgiving, going to church, singing and praising God in the sanctuary, participating in cultic festivals, serving in the temple), ritual recitations, acts of devotion (praying, fasting and reading the Bible) and cultic gathering of the congregation at a designated day, time and place for services and proclamation of the word only.\(^3\) Growing up in a very pious Christian family, those ideas and practices are not peculiar to me and I believe this applies to every Christian family. In fact, it has been a part of my life ever since a very young age. However, the danger entailed in this ideology of worship is that once we step out of the Church, our lives become no different than those of the skeptic or secular people.

I have seen many people, some of them leaders, whose lives are radically different from their lives inside the Church, and I am no exception. People who sound most spiritual in the church become most cunning, oppressive, deceitful and harmful in their daily relationship with others. It is like a Christian is someone in church worship and someone else outside the church. In so doing, we are living a life that implicitly indicates that the God we worship is present only in the Church and absent outside of the Church. The tendency of living this kind of life is to limit or confine God only in a sacred place such as the Church, to limit God from being omnipresent, to being present only in sacred places—from being the Lord of all, to being the Lord of the sacred. That could be the reason why there are people who always look and sound sacred when coming into church

worship service, but not necessarily outside the church. I once witnessed my senior pastor preaching in the pulpit that non-believers in his neighborhood are more honest, humble, caring and loving than we people that label ourselves as pious Christians. For this matter, asking questions like “What really is worship?,” “Is it something that we do only in the Church?,” “What impact does it have in one’s life?,” and “What role does it play in our everyday life?” becomes imperative. We become very accustomed to thinking and living as if only sacred things are related to God while secular ones are just related to human beings. Sadly, this kind of living a life with complexities also has spoiled the essence of Christian worship, and thereby weakened the Christian experience and testimony in the world.

Because of so much emphasis on activities such as “cultic acts, ritual recitals, cultic objects, cultic persons and cultic occasions and places,” many times we fail to recognize and realize how this worship should have an impact and direction in our daily living. This media of worship has become sacred and other things are secular. Thus, believers do sacred things reverently while doing secular things irreverently. As a consequence, sacred (worship) life in the sanctuary and secular (ethical) life in the world are dichotomized. This has become some sort of common habit of Christianity. Ravi Zacharias comments on how the Eastern cultures view it this way:

In Eastern culture, appearance and essence are implicitly accepted as two different parts of reality and can oppose one another. Indeed, it is very common in many Eastern cultures to live a bifurcated life. For instance, your religions life and your moral life are not necessarily connected. It is perfectly acceptable for a man to

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Ibid., 14-46.
light holy candles, walk out of the temple, and then lie through his teeth about what he’s selling you.  

Myanmar, as a Buddhist country and a “very religious country,” also has a similar problem of dichotomizing worship and ethics which is justified by the Burmese (national language of Myanmar) saying, “Pa sat kah phaya phaya; let kah kaayaa kaayaa,” which literally means “while the mouth says ‘god, god’ the hands are doing whatever they want to do.” It is called living a double life: a daily ethical life that does not match a worship life.

As a result of dichotomizing worship and ethical life, within Christendom we have so many corruptions among leaders; we have oppressions among the rich and the poor, the strong and the weak, and the powerful people taking advantages of the disadvantage ones; we have infidelities especially among family members; we have betrayal in almost every relationship and friendship, we have injustice done by those in higher positions to those in lower positions, etc. The kind of lives we live have confused those who have come and lived near us by failing to implement all the things that we profess and practice in the Church. This reality of how messy Christians’ lives have been reminded me of Mahatma Gandhi once saying, “I like their Christ, but I don’t like their Christians.”

This issue is prevalent in the Old Testament as well. The prophets have a good deal to say regarding the dichotomy of worship and ethics in the life of God’s people. Among these prophets, the eighth-century prophets (Amos, Hosea, Isaiah and Micah) are distinguished in decrying “the absence of ethical integrity in the lives of the worshipers

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and their leaders. They lament and denounce apparently flourishing cult, but a cult devoid of any sense of social responsibility toward the powerless and disenfranchised within the community. Besides, they all unanimously insist that true worship begins in daily life and should be demonstrated by walking humbly with God, acting with justice and kindness toward others (Micah 6:6-8).

This research focuses particularly on the teaching of Micah, the eighth-century prophet, because his oracles focus mainly on the people of God, Judah and Israel. Moreover, like Amos, Hosea and Isaiah, “he stridently challenges the divorce of worship and ethical behaviour” and attempts to reunite them. In this way, Micah plainly answered his compatriots who asked “with what” they should worship the Lord: “He has told you, O man, what is good; what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God” (6:8).

The response is silent about sacrifices, even though the questions concern what Man should bring with him as a sacrifice as he approaches the Lord. While the questions deal with “what,” the response deals with “how” man should approach the Lord. This stands as a reminder to reconsider the relationship between worship and social ethics. According to J.M.P Smith, this verse is “the finest summary of the content of practical religion to be found in the Old Testament.”

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8 Marrs, “Micah and a Theological Critique of Worship,” 185.

Therefore, this study proposes a more integral and fruitful relationship between worship and ethics by rediscovering the social role of worship in the teaching of Micah. Robinson discerns this relationship as a unique one which is not “the mere interfusion of the two but it was the integration of both into a new unity as when hydrogen and oxygen combine to produce water.”¹⁰ In another metaphor, worship is described as being like the root or source of social ethics and social ethics is the fruits, leaves and branches of worship. Hence, social ethics have no basis outside of worship and worship is justified by social ethics.¹¹

**Purpose of the Research**

My purpose in this study is to understand the message of Micah profoundly and properly in its historical-political context where God’s people misunderstood the nature of worship by dichotomizing worship and ethics in real life. This study will let the text speak with its own voice on the subject of worship and see what Micah has to say about the matter of acceptable worship. In fact, little research has been made on the subject of worship in the book of Micah, even though it has much to say on it. And most of the books that have been written on the subject of worship focused more on the ritual activities done inside the church, and not much on its reflection and impact on the lives of the individuals.

Peterson also believes that worship involves more than mere involvement in the cultic activities of the assembled congregation which we call worship services; it is more

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of a daily walk of obedience. He says, “Although some of Scripture’s terms for worship may refer to specific gestures of homage, rituals or priestly ministrations, worship is more fundamentally faith expressing itself in obedience and adoration. Consequently, in both Testaments it is often shown to be personal and moral fellowship with God relevant to every sphere of life.”

Hence, this study solely depends on the book of Micah as it aims to investigate Micah’s teaching on the matter of worship or the kind of worship that God desires, and what impact does it have in one’s daily communal life. It is my wish and hope that at the end of this study the researcher herself and her audiences will become more convinced and will become crystal clear about the role of worship in our daily ethical life, the relationship between worship and social ethics, and thereby develop a new character that contributes in building a more responsible and relatable individuals, church and society.

**Explanation of Key Terms**

I believe the exact meanings of words are very crucial in every theological work. It helps the readers to quickly grasp the intended meaning of a particular work. Thus, I am providing the explanation of the key terms that are being used in this research work.

**Worship:** The term “worship” in this research mainly connotes obeying and living God’s command not just in the Church but also in our daily lives. In fact, the eighth-century prophets like Amos, Hosea, Isaiah and Micah all unanimously insist that true worship begins in daily life and should be demonstrated by walking humbly with God, acting with justice and kindness toward others (Micah 6:6-8, Hosea 6:6, Isaiah 1:10-17, Amos 5:21-

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Moreover, Peterson also said that “Obedience to God in cultic observance is to go hand in hand with obedience in matters of everyday life.” 13 Jeremy Begbie’s statement on this matter is notable: “the vocabulary of worship can be picked up and used in a non-cultic way to denote a lifestyle, flowing out of a heart humbled before God (Ps. 51:17), and there are frequent attacks on empty cultic acts divorced from appropriate behaviour.” 14 Therefore, this research proposes that worship is not something to be confined to the acts of devotion, rites and ceremonies only. Its meaning and purpose goes beyond, and relates to every sphere of human life. A lifestyle of obedience to love God as well as our neighbours (Deut. 6:5; Lev.19:18) in serving them is complete integrity of worship.

**Social Ethics:** Ethics in this research simply means how one ought to live or behave in his/her daily life. Fundamentally, all ethics are social ethics because human beings are created to be social beings. 15 All ethics have to do with the problem of right conduct and no conduct is purely self-regarding. In fact, there can be no genuine personhood in isolation from other persons. We are all interdependent. For instance, when someone acts, others are unavoidably affected by what he/she does; all of his/her choices and decisions have social consequences always. These points are all specially recognized in Christian ethics, with its emphasis on love and communion, and the notion that we are all members in the body of Jesus Christ. We all live in relationship with God and with our neighbours. Ethics in this particular research will cover how we ought to live or behave in our

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13 Ibid., 49.


relationship with others, especially to the less fortunate one in society such as the poor, the needy and the weak.

**Methodology**

Since this study is mainly biblical and exegetical, I aim to interpret the Bible properly. In order to accomplish this goal, I will apply a holistic exegetical approach that seeks to examine all aspects of a passage: 1) syntactical/grammatical, 2) literary, 3) theological, and 4) historical aspects. I will attempt to comprehend these four aspects in the light of the whole and vice versa. In fact, all of these four aspects are closely connected and have an effect on one another; they are intertwined throughout the Bible. Thus, the mutual interaction of these four aspects is important in the exegesis of Biblical passages.

This study will diligently seek and try to discover what the relationship between worship and social ethics is based on the teaching of Micah 6:1-8. As a theological foundation in this study, I will first briefly examine the general understanding of worship in the Torah. Then I will exegete the chosen passage in detail and draw a conclusion regarding its theological message. Thereafter, I will draw the implications for today’s church, especially Chin Christian Community in Myanmar, which is still very much in need of a social ethics to inspire, direct and validate its ministry of promoting and instituting social justice. Finally, this message will give the Community a challenge to be diligent in discovering and living out the social role that is entailed in biblical worship.

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with the hope of building and creating a better worshiping community that benefits a wider community.
CHAPTER TWO

OLD TESTAMENT UNDERSTANDING OF WORSHIP (TORAH)

Though the history and idea of worship are as old as human kind, there is no exact term for the word “worship” in the Old Testament.\(^1\) Yet, there are many words and ideas in the Scripture that contribute to our understanding of the whole theme of worship. Basically, biblical worship is based on the concept of a covenant relationship between God and the Israelites, the chosen and redeemed people.\(^2\) This covenant relationship is initiated and established by God himself first with the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and their descendants with a promise to make them into a great nation, and be blessed so that the whole earth will in turn be blessed through them (Gen.12: 1-3,7; 13:14-17; 15:1-8, 12-16). The patriarchs did not build altars and offer their sacrifices at any spot, but

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\(^2\) According to Leonard, “The biblical covenant was similar in form to treaties that were in common use in the ancient Near East and which were thus part of the cultural background for the Scriptures. In ancient Near Eastern culture, covenant was used extensively to maintain a relationship between states/individuals by defining acceptable modes of behavior among them. In this covenant, the stronger one is called ‘lord’ and the weaker one, known as the ‘servant.’ Under the terms of the covenant, the lord is bound to protect the servant and the servant is required to allegiance [sic] to his lord alone; he must make no alliances with any other king and must fight together with his own lord against all his lord’s enemies. He must also treat other client kings/members who are in covenant with his lord as brothers/sisters, and he cannot harm them or invade their territories.” Janice E. Leonard, “The Concept of Covenant in Biblical Worship,” in *The Biblical Foundations of Christian Worship*, vol. 1 of The Complete Library of Christian Worship, ed. Robert Webber (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1993), 56.
only at the place where God manifested himself to them (Gen.12:7-8; 13:14-18; 28:10-22).³

Furthermore, the Israelites’ liberation from their slavery in Egypt was for the purpose of divine service or worship. After his mighty act of redeeming them, God revealed himself to them at Mount Sinai (Ex.19:4), where the terms of the relationship were set out and the pattern for acceptable worship was laid down (Ex.19-20). In liberating the Israelites from their slavery, God fulfilled the covenant he made with the patriarch, and the people were now told how to keep the covenant and live it out in their daily relationships.⁴ Through this covenant framework the people of Israel learn God’s way, pledge their allegiance to him, and respond to him in worship.⁵ Once again, Ex.20:2 makes it clear that this covenant relationship is based on the grounds of God’s liberating action for Israel. The phrase אָנֹכִי יהוה “I am Yahweh” is “a confession of authority, the authority of the real and effective presence of Yahweh who rescues, sustains, calls, and, on the basis of all that, expects a positive response from humankind.”⁶

The people of Israel are to remember what the Lord has done for them, and it has to be the source of their inspiration for performing the acts commanded in the stipulations of the covenant. Birch states it this way: “God’s prior initiative of grace and freedom is the presupposition on which the various obligations of God’s people rest.”⁷ A list of

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⁴ David Peterson, Engaging with God, 26-28.

⁵ Janice E. Leonard, the Biblical Foundation of Christian Worship, 56.


laws/commandments was incumbent upon the Israelites as they respond to God’s gracious deeds they have experienced (Ex. 20:1-17). Though their response as a covenant people begins with exclusive commitment to and worship of God, most of the laws are concerned with proper activity and relationships within the community.⁸

In fact, while commandments one through four deal with one’s relationship to God (vv.1-11), commandments five through ten deal with relationships to one’s neighbor or life in the social community (vv.12-17).⁹ The Sabbath-keeping commandment, then, bridges the individual’s relationship with God and relationship with his/her neighbor.

Balentine profoundly explains this point in this way:

By placing the charge to keep the Sabbath at the center of God’s instructions, (Ex. 20:8-11), the Decalogue (20:1-17) addresses the importance of worship in the life of the community. As the heart of God’s commandments, Sabbath-keeping serves as the vital gateway between commitment to God in loving him absolutely (vv. 3-7) and commitment to others in the world with absolute fidelity (vv.12-17).¹⁰

Furthermore, the subsequent passage (Ex.20:22-23:33), which contains moral, social and ritual laws, functioned as an application of the above principles for various aspect of life in the Promised Land. A similar mix of laws in the book of Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy also points to what it means for Israel to worship the Lord.¹¹ This implicitly shows that moral and social laws are not to be viewed separately from ritual laws as they all are already and equally in place in the framework of worship to the living God, their only redeemer.

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⁸ Birch, 169.
⁹ Birch, 169.
Thus, in this covenant behavior the people’s commitment to his/her neighbor is equally important as their devotion to their God because “the laws themselves and their covenant contexts do not allow the separation of cultic and social matters.”

Their focus is on the protection of the disadvantaged, weak, vulnerable persons in the society such as the widow, the orphan, the poor and the resident alien because in this covenant community, every member is equally precious to God, regardless of their social standing.

Moreover, the motivational factor for this concern is that they too were once “resident aliens” in the land of Egypt (22:21; 23:9). God’s people are commanded “to identify with and imitate God, who acted with justice and compassion toward them when they were slaves; who executes justice for the weak and vulnerable such as the poor, orphan and widow; and who loves strangers, providing them food and clothing.”

They are to apply this concern everyday in all the spheres of their lives—family, religion, economy, politics, and society.

Israel also expressed its covenant relationship with God through sacrifice and ritual through the mediation of the priests. The Tabernacle, which was then developed into the actual building of the Temple in the time of King Solomon (I King 6:1ff), was built according to God’s instruction received by Moses (Ex.25:9), with its outer court, inner court and holy of holies where only the high priest could enter once a year for the atonement of sin for himself and the Israelites (Ex.30:10, Lev. 16:18-19). At the

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13 “The resident aliens were expected to conform in a general way to the religious and moral milieu but did not enjoy all the privileges. They had no family estates passed from generation to generation. The biblical texts suggest that they commonly earned a living by day labor. Without inherited land, they could not sit among the elders and may not have been allowed to institute suits before the court and thus become victims to be exploited.” Dale Patrick, *Old Testament Law* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1985), 86.

consecration of Aaron and his sons to the priesthood, the sacrificial system was inaugurated and the detailed instructions on how to handle a proper ritual and sacrificial offerings were given (Lev.8-9). Both the Priests and Israelites were to carry out the detailed sacrificial ordinances and ritual systems in accordance with the decrees of God so that God would manifest himself and dwell among them, to bless them (Ex.29:42-46). Through this sacrificial system God made it possible for the sinful people to draw near to him, receive his grace and blessing.\(^\text{15}\)

Therefore, from Israel’s part, obedience and submission to these stipulations is vital. Failure to obey and engage according to the Lord’s request in the ritual and everyday life will have an enormous consequence on the people even to “the terrible judgment of exile.”\(^\text{16}\) Thus, from the part of the worshiper, it is very important that approaching God and worshipping Him only in the way that he requires or that is acceptable to him is their major duty as the covenant people.

Thus, from Old Testament point of view, biblical worship is something made possible by God for his people, and it is all about what he requires and pleases him. It does not start with human intuition; human beings could not come to the presence of God on their own terms. Many times we tend to define the meaning of worship in our own terms as if we can determine for ourselves what is honoring and acceptable to God. In this way, we many times obscure the breadth and depth of the Bible’s teaching on this matter. As a result, we tend to take it narrowly “in the usual, limited fashion, applying it

\(^{15}\) Peterson, Engaging with God, 32, 49.

\(^{16}\) Peterson, 49.
mainly to what goes on in Sunday Service.”

In this way, we become far more negligent of uncovering its social role and the impact that it should have in the individual and societal level.

Keeping in mind that worshiping the living God for Israel is only possible by engaging the terms that he proposes and requires, we are going to explore the three fundamental Hebrew words that are usually translated as “worship” to help us comprehend more of what it meant for people to connect with God back then and what significant meanings they convey. They are חוה, עבד, and ירא, and they are used in a variety of contexts. We will find out if these words also have a reference far beyond what God’s people are to do when they meet together on Sunday Service or other gatherings.

**Worship as Homage**

The first biblical word used for worship in the Old Testament is חוה, which occurs only in a stem called Hishtaphel, hence הִשְׁתַחֲוָה, meaning to “bow (politely or respectfully), prostrate oneself, make obeisance, bend low (in worship or as a mark of respect).” The verb is part of a more inclusive action and used to express outwardly the inward attitude of respect or homage. In other words, the biblical worship does not either start or end itself only in the outward sign. The outward gesture is always a by-

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17 Peterson, 14.


20 Ibid., 249.
product or a result of real motivation that comes out from the inward attitude of respect, gratitude and honor. It is an inside-out movement. The action also shows one’s humbleness in a sense because without humility, bowing down oneself with respect before another person will not be easy or even possible. People may bow down before another person as the culture demands, but this kind of action can be done without necessarily the inward attitude of respect.

This terminology is used in both secular and cultic contexts depending on their various settings. In secular contexts, the action is usually performed before superior persons as a simple greeting with respect, honor and homage to acknowledge their higher rank; Abraham bowed himself to the earth before three strangers (Gen. 18:12), Jacob and his family bowed to Esau his elder brother (Gen. 33:3, 6-7), and Moses bowed down before Jethro, his father-in-law (Ex.18:7). Depending on the situation, sometimes the gesture is more of an expression of obeisance and homage with gratitude; Abraham bowed to the people of the land with gratitude for allowing him to bury his wife, Sarah, in the cave of Machpelah (Gen. 23:7, 12). Other times, the gesture is more of the supplication or entreaty before a great one (Ex.11:8; 2 Sa.14:4, 16:4).\(^\text{21}\) In blessings, it may be promised or wished that others will bow to the recipient of the blessing (Gen. 27:29; 49:8). Very often the term is used in the sense of “homage to the king” as a gesture of absolute submission or surrender (1 Sam 24:8; 2 Sam 1:2; 9:6; 1Kgs 1:16, 31).\(^\text{22}\)

\(^{21}\) Peterson, *Engaging with God*, 58.

It is important to take note that all the elements of the inward attitude occurring in the secular context are repeated in the cultic context when people bow down to worship the Lord. Most of these actions found in the Scripture are preceded by God’s deeds. For example, God answers the prayer of Abraham’s servant as he is looking for a bride for Isaac, then he bows and worships Yahweh out of gratitude for the choice of a bride (Gen. 24:26, 48, 52). Moreover, after the Israelites in Egypt are told that the Lord is concerned enough about them and that he has seen their affliction, they bow low and worship (Ex.4:31). Their actions are motivated by gratitude and trust in God’s promise to rescue them. When the Israelites see the pillar of cloud coming down to the tent of meeting and standing there, they rise up and bow in worship to acknowledge God’s presence and express their humble submission to God (Ex.33:10).

According to Peterson’s observation, “The only command in the Mosaic law to bend over before the Lord was in connection with the presentation of the first fruits at the sanctuary approved by God (Deut 26:1-11).” In fact, this paragraph summarizes the necessary memories, covenantal obligations, and the spirit of gratitude in which God’s people must live. The focus of worship in this paragraph is “God who identified himself as ‘the LORD your God’—this phrase occurs nine times (vv. 1, 2 [twice], 3, 4, 5, 10 [twice], 11)—to highlight the fact that it is he who gave the fruit and not the pagan gods, to whom their neighbors looked for fruit.”

The purpose of this worship is to express their gratitude for what the Lord has done in their lives, and to acknowledge and humbly submit to God as their Savior,

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23 Peterson, Engaging with God, 59.

Provider and Sustainer of life.\textsuperscript{25} Moreover, their worship is not just to benefit the worshiper spiritually, but it is also to benefit the Levites (and the sojourners, widows, poor, orphans) materially (v. 11). These people are disadvantaged, have no intrinsic right to land, and are dependent on the generosity of the people (Deut 12:10-12, 18; 14:28-29).\textsuperscript{26} Therefore, we can glimpse the fact that in Old Testament understanding, worship is not just a vertical thanksgiving to God, it is also a horizontal action for the people around them within the community especially to the needy, the poor and the most disadvantaged ones. Wright aptly noted it this way: “Vertical thanksgiving for God’s goodness must be matched by horizontal action for the needy.”\textsuperscript{27} In other words, our worship rendered to God for his goodness is only acceptable to him when matched by our willingness to do for others what He has done for us in our lives.

For Israel as the people of God, the cultic worship of other gods and their images is strictly forbidden (Ex. 20:5; Deut 5:9). Very often, the verbs פָה and עֲבַד occur together in this context (Ex. 20:5; 23:24; Deut 4:19; 5:9; 8:19; 11:16; 17:3; 29:26; 30:17).\textsuperscript{28} God’s people are prohibited from bowing down in worship before any other gods than Yahweh alone. As Wright notes, “When Israel went after other gods, the effects were not just religious but also ethical. For idolatry always has a disastrous social and ethical effect.”\textsuperscript{29} Thus, their obedient life is attested by prohibition. God has already taken the initiative in

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{25} Peterson, \textit{Engaging with God}, 59.
\item \textsuperscript{26} Eugene H. Merrill, \textit{Deuteronomy: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture. NAC vol.4} (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 334.
\item \textsuperscript{27} Christopher J. H. Wright, \textit{Old Testament Ethics for the People of God} (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2011), 43.
\item \textsuperscript{28} Preuss, \textit{TDOT 4}:253-54.
\item \textsuperscript{29} Wright, \textit{Old Testament Ethics for the People of God}, 25.
\end{itemize}
redeeming his people and now obedience to him in their every sphere of life becomes a matter of response and gratitude to him, not of a blind obedience to rules.

Therefore, according to this analysis the acceptable worship or worship that honors God must come from inside attitude as it is motivated by a heart of gratitude, humility, faith, submission and obedience. In fact, all of these elements are essentials to the Old Testament concept of worship. Without these elements, worship is futile.

**Worship as Service**

Another biblical word for worship is **עבד**, meaning “to serve, work for a master as a slave (household/kingdom), and worship.” This word is used both in secular and cultic contexts as well. First, the word **עבד** is used in the context of agricultural work (Gen. 2:15). It is the common term for tilling the soil (2:5, 15; 3:23; 4:2, 12). Gen. 2:15 says, “And the LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to till/work on/cultivate it and keep it.” Although the narrator had already mentioned that God put man in the garden in verse 8, he added the purpose for doing it here in verse 15. The man’s primary assignment is **עבד** and **שׁמר** to “work” and “take care” of the ground which the Lord God created in Eden (v. 15; cf. 2:5). The use of two infinitive constructs, to work and to keep, with the preposition ל indicates the purpose of an action and establishes this point further. Hence, work is “a God-given assignment but not a cursed condition.” Obeyedly working the garden and taking care of it is serving the Lord

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31 Eugene Carpenter, “**עבד**,” *NIDOTE* 3:304.

God, who gave man the task. Clearly, though there was no such thing as visible and tangible worship place in the Garden of Eden, there was already a sanctuary symbolism in there. The very first human being served God in the Garden of Eden by diligently obeying His command. This could be counted as an act of worship.

Carpenter’s careful observation of “working the ground” in a larger canonical context of Genesis 1-4 offers a profound theological statement, “The response of the ground itself is ultimately dependent on humankind’s spiritual relation to God and, hence, to the ground.”

Man’s relation to God and to the ground (his environment) is interrelated. Because of humankind’s disobedience to God’s command, the ground is cursed and produces thorns and thistles (3:17-19). However, it should be noted that the object of the curse is the ground, not the work.

Furthermore, the word ḫōbē is used as well in describing a normal daily work or secular services such as the work of the wage earner (Gen 29:15, 27, 30; 30:26, 29; 31:6, 41, Jacob works for Rachel) and daily business.

In the Sabbath commandment (Ex.20:8ff; Deut. 5:12ff.), the verb ḫōbē is used to mention doing all kinds of work/business as contrasted to Sabbath (cease, celebrate). Furthermore, it is found in the first portion of the Ten Commandments hanging on the command to love God. Yet it

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33 Eugene Carpenter, NIDOTE 3:305. “Working the ground became a burdensome task after the rebellion of humankind (3:17-19). The banishment of Cain from the land furthered this alienation (4:2), because the earth would no longer yield the reward for cultivating it.”


36 “Comprehensively, the biblical commandments occur in two levels—to love God (Deut 6:5) and to love your neighbor as yourselves (Lev 19:18b). Generally, while the first one requires a loyal, covenantal obedience to God, the second one requires loving (loyal) treatment of other human beings. Hence, while the first one implies a vertical relationship, the second one does imply a horizontal
still refers to caring for human beings. Although the Sabbath commandment (Ex.20:8ff) is dedicated to the Lord, the practical part is for the sake of human beings. According to Fretheim, this bridges the first four commandments to the remaining commandments concerned with inter-personal relationships.

Birch observes that this commandment has implications for “the activity of the community and relationships within the community especially in the Deuteronomic version.” In fact, it is described as “the world’s first workers’ bill of rights . . . a new social order, in which work and leisure are not divided along class lines.” Everyone—master, male/female servant, son, daughter, sojourner—who is within the family and community is equal under the Sabbath law and has equal right to work and rest. Moreover, it is “even applied to animals of burden such as ox and donkey. God wanted all his creatures to get some relief from their labor.” Hence, according to this context it is justified to say that worship has two relational directions—towards God and towards others. The two complement each other so that one cannot be achieved without the other.


Derby supposes that the real reason for the different wording of the fourth commandment in Exodus and Deuteronomy is because of the different settings. Exodus is written by Moses and it commemorates creation. However, Deuteronomy is written by learned scribes in the eighth century B.C. against slavery and it commemorates the Exodus deliverance. Josiah Derby, “The Fourth Commandment,” JBQ 22 (1994): 30.


Birch, Let Justice Roll Down, 169.


Ibid., 593.
Thirdly, the word עבד is used in describing a relationship between a slave and his/her master in various forms such as subjugation and dependence, or a total claim on a person or loyalty.\(^{42}\) The word refers to “a humble relationship and a faithful discharging of the work given to a slave.”\(^ {43}\) God instructs his people on how to treat those who become poor and indebted to others as they work as servants to get out of debt (Lev. 25:39). Here, the concern is how a slave serves his/her master and how a master treats his/her slave in their human-human relationship. Both the way a master treats his servant and how a slave serves his/her master are counted before God.

Last but not least, the word עבד is more frequently used in cultic service. The purpose of the Exodus is stated clearly: that the Israelites may leave to worship/serve the Lord (3:12; 4:23; 5:1; 7:16; 8:1, 16, 20; 9:1, 13; 10:3, 7; 12:31). However, this worship is not confined to media of worship because it is a relationship between God and his people, not providing only sacrificial service to God, but connecting with people within the community.

Westermann states that “in Ex. 3ff. the sacrificial offering required by Yahweh is a contingent event that plays a role in a historical process.”\(^ {44}\) According to him, there are “two varied concepts of ‘serving God’ and ‘worship service’ that continues in the OT, in the NT and in the language of the church until the present: ‘serving God’ in a specific, regular action and ‘serving God’ in a contingent, everyday act, usually designated ‘cultic’


\(^{43}\) Herbert, *Worship in Ancient Israel*, 11.

\(^{44}\) Claus Westermann, “עבד” *TLOT* 2:829. And Westermann is not satisfied with the translation of the word עבד ‘to serve’ in Exodus because he thinks it cannot express effectively the intention herein. For him the intention is that the acknowledgement of Yahweh as the Lord requires a specific deed to express it as proper and necessary.
and ‘ethical’ service to God.’ Both concepts are intertwined in Exodus. Cultic service and ethical service to God go hand in hand. Cultic actions and everyday acts are like one piece.

As Ringgren observes, using Yahweh as its object, the verb עבד has an extended meaning—to fear him, to follow him, to walk in his ways, to keep his commandments, to love him, to serve him, and to cling to him (Deut. 10:12; 13:4). Therefore, all of these verbs carry a sense of obedience in keeping God’s commandments. This is a “religious and ethical disposition encompassing a person’s entire life, one coming to expression especially in the obedient keeping of the commandments.” In serving and worshipping God, there is always a keeping of his commandments with a heart full of obedience and a total lifestyle of commitment. Thus, it is important to take note that worship, from the scriptural point of view always involves “specific acts of adoration and submission as well as a lifestyle of obedient service” in everyday life. The service of God demanded obedience and faithfulness in every sphere of life, with cultic activity as a particular expression of Israel’s dependence and submission to God.

The Levites are chosen to serve in the Tabernacle assisting the priest (Num 3:6-8; 8:22, 26; 18:6, 21). Hence, serving in the Tabernacle becomes their daily work for living; they are given the entire tithe in Israel for their inheritance (Num 18:21-22) which

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45 ClausWestermann, “עֶבֶד” TLOT 2:829.
46 Ringgren, TDOT 10:386.
47 Ringgren, 386.
48 Peterson, Engaging with God, 70.
49 Peterson, 67.
is described synonymously as service to the Lord (Num 8:11). Hence, the object of the verb ṣeḇa' may not always be Yahweh, but it is still descriptive of service to Him indirectly by obediently doing the duties given by God. Even though the word may not appear in the cultic context, it still relates to God in terms of serving him, obeying him, and loving him.

Worship as Reverence

The third biblical word used for worship in the Old Testament is יָרֵא meaning “fear someone or something.”\(^{50}\) Due to the parameters of this study, I will focus only on the “fear of God” which becomes synonymous with “reverence, worship, and obedience to God’s command.”\(^{51}\) According to Peterson, whenever the terminology is used, “fear of God in the more positive sense of reverence or respect is regularly on view although the Old Testament acknowledges that dread, shaking, trembling or terror may be appropriate responses to a divine revelation in a certain contexts (Ex. 3:6, 19:6, 20:18-19).”\(^{52}\) In fact, as in Exodus 14:31 Yahweh’s great power displayed against the Egyptians is the reason Israel fears and trusts the Lord and his servant Moses. Hence, “Numinous fear becomes the starting point of a semantic development that reduces the element of literal fear to ‘a moral fear of God’ and through affirmation and confession of Yahweh approaches the


\(^{51}\) Fuhs, 298.

\(^{52}\) Peterson, 71.
‘cultic concept’ (fear = worship).”

God takes the initiative and the people respond in fear, trust, worship and obedience.

In Deuteronomistic literature, only verbal forms are used and the infinitive construct with the preposition ל is characterized by and its object is always “Yahweh” or the phrase “Yahweh your/our God.” According to Fuhs’ analysis, Deuteronomy 5 and 6 as a single unit makes it clear that יָרֵא means ‘worship’ in the sense of fidelity to the covenant God. Moreover, the word יָרֵא appears repeatedly together with the following words: to keep/observe the commandments (5:29; 6:2, 24; 8:6; 13:5; 17:19; 31:12), to serve/worship the Lord (6:13; 10:12, 20; 13:4), to walk in his ways (8:6; 10:12), to cling to him (10:20; 13:5), to love him (10:12), and to follow him (13:4). All of these words imply obedience and faithfulness to God himself and his commandments in the daily lives of his people. In fact, the practice of these words is not confined to a sacred time and place but is to be exercised always (5:29) all the days of their lives (6:2) with their whole existence (10:12).

God’s people are to learn to fear the Lord (Deut 4:10; 14:23; 17:19; 31:12f.). The purpose of all cultic activities—gathering to hear God’s words/law (4:10; 31:12f.); tithing (14:23); reading the law (17:19)—which God’s people are commanded to observe, is that they learn to fear the Lord their God. No one is exempted from this learning as Deuteronomy 31:12 stresses “the people, the men and the women and children and the


alien who is in your town” Moreover, they are not only to fear the Lord for their entire lives but also they must teach their children (4:10). Regarding the purpose of giving the tithe, Merrill states that “the underlying purpose for presenting the tithe was to instill within the Israelite a proper reverence for the Lord as the Sovereign, the one to whom he was ultimately accountable.”

Aside from the cultic setting, the fear of God conveys “the general sense of ethical conduct.” Abraham lied to Abimelech King of Gerar and his people because he thought that there was no fear of God in Gerar and he feared for his life (Gen. 20:1-18). In this passage, the fear of God is associated with “respect for the rights and freedom of strangers.” Showing love to strangers by giving them food and clothing is one of the righteous deeds which expresses the fear of God (Deut. 10:18-20).

Furthermore, Gen. 22:12 defines the fear of God “as obedience to God, trust that makes it possible to take the ultimate task regardless of the cost.” Abraham’s being a God-fearing man is proved by the fact that he did not withhold his only son from God. Ex. 1:15–21 defines fear of God as disobedience to the command of the Egyptian king. “Obedience to God’s will gives [one] the courage to disobey to the will of political oppressors who command death where God’s will is life.”

Also in the book of Leviticus certain texts reflect “a specialized development of the ethical concept of fear of God. The Holiness Code contains five occurrences of the

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56 Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, 240.
58 Ibid, 310.
59 Ibid, 310.
60 Ibid, 310.
formula ‘You shall fear your God; I am Yahweh’”⁶¹ which implies that the weak and helpless, namely, the deaf, the blind (Lev. 19:14), the elderly (v. 32), poor (25:17, 36), and slave (25:43) are to be protected by the fear of God. So the fear of God in these verses “lends weight to requirements of mercy or social justice.”⁶² These requirements of mercy or social justice are not just general ethical norms but they are the declared will of the covenant God. Therefore, they demand obedience.

Thus the fear of God, according to this observation, is used both in cultic and ethical concepts and “it refers to worship of the Lord, faithfulness to the covenant, which finds expression in the cult of the Lord alone and observance of the Covenant Code”⁶³ in the whole daily existence of God’s people. It would be wrong to conclude that true biblical worship is confined to a particular activity, place or time. But it is evident that the terms used for “worship” in the Torah encapsulate all areas of human life—sacred, secular, moral and social. Thus, the life of a true worshiper is always associated with obedience, love, gratitude, faithfulness, respect and humility in his/her relation with God and with neighbor.

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⁶¹ Ibid, 313.
⁶² Ibid, 313.
⁶³ Ibid, 308.
CHAPTER THREE
THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF THE BOOK OF MICAH

The history of God’s people in the Old Testament witnesses that “times of crisis or radical social change seemed to elicit prophetic responses” as, in the times of their great crises, God raised great prophets to convene the needs of his people.¹ Prophets at the time were identified and remembered as royal heralds sent by the deity and commissioned to do particular tasks. They were like God’s own voice. When the prophet spoke, it was as if God were speaking. Prophets were particularly prominent during the monarchic period, as certain social and political conditions necessitated the prophetic behavior.² Thus, acquiring the knowledge of the historical background in which the prophets usually addressed political, social and religious issues of their times becomes crucial in order to get the prophetic message right. This study aims to look briefly at the historical background of the book of Micah, mainly based on the internal and external resources thereafter.

According to the opening verse of the book, the time of Micah’s ministry to God’s people was during the reigns of Jotham (742-735 B.C.), Ahaz (735-715 B.C.), and Hezekiah (715-686 B.C.) in the southern kingdom. According to Dempster, “When Jotham came to the throne in Judah, a remarkable period of stability and peace ended in

¹ Bruce C. Birch et al., eds., A Theological Introduction to the Old Testament (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1999), 294.
² Ibid., 294-295.
both the northern and southern kingdoms.”

His exact contemporary prophet was Isaiah of Jerusalem, who lived and ministered to the royal court in Jerusalem during the same period as Micah. Though Micah’s prophetic ministry is mainly based in Jerusalem, he also prophesies against Samaria, Jerusalem, their leaders and the region around his hometown of Moresheth. Micah’s prophecy against Samaria (1:2-8) probably came in the early part of his ministry sometime before the fall of Samaria to the Assyrians in 722 B.C.

Aside from mentioning the prophet’s hometown as Moresheth, very little is known about Micah the person or his genealogy whatsoever. It is not very surprising though because “the prophets’ lives were not nearly as important as their calling and their obedience in being a vehicle for the divine word in history.” The same holds true for prophet Micah. The Prophet’s hometown, Moresheth, is located about 20 miles southwest of Jerusalem and not far from the Philistine city of Gath to its northwest.

Because of its location, situated in the rich and fertile land of the southern hill country of Judah, Moresheth was an important farming community that provides surplus produce.

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3 “In the north, the long dynasty of Jehu had just finished, and for the next two decades there would be an unbroken sequence of bloody coups. Zechariah (746-745), Shalum (745), Menahem (745-737 B.C.), Pekahiah (737-736 B.C.), Pekah (736-732 B.C.), and Hoshea (732-722; in captivity 724-722 B.C.) were kings, presided over the destruction of the nation” (2 Kgs 15-17). Stephen G. Dempster, *Micah* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2017), 9.


5 Mitchell, 59.


not only for itself but also for the nearby villages. It was a strategic border town that protects the southwest part of Judah from invasion.\(^8\)

Moreover, it was suggested that Micah could possibly be from the tribe of Judah since his hometown is within the territory of Judah.\(^9\) Though his original occupation is unknown, Micah probably may have been a farmer as he certainly indentified with the members of his village whose small farms were being swallowed up by the wealthy landowners (2:1-4). According to Wolff quoted by Dempster, it is also believed that Micah was also “a leading elder in the town of Moresheth, which explains his concern for justice and the plight of the small farmer and the poor.”\(^10\) Most important of all, Micah was known as courageous enough to proclaim God’s judgment against his own nation that is so fraudulent in its economic, political and religious system. He speaks against false worship and for social justice.

**Socio-Economic and Political Context**

Micah lived in a time of international fear and insecurity. Because of the Syro-Ephraimitic crisis (734-732 B.C.) and the tribute Ahaz gave to the king of Assyria (2 Chr. 28:5-8, 17-21), Judah’s socio-economic situation was terribly weakened.\(^11\) In this period of crisis, the area surrounding Jerusalem was sacked, with the rebellious and destructive neighboring countries preying on them, eventually resulting in a loss of goods, stored


\(^{11}\) “The Syro-Ephraimitic crisis pitted Israel in league with Damascus against Judah. The southern state responded by asking for Assyrian assistance against the coalition at their northern borders.” Bruce C. Birch et al., eds., *A Theological Introduction to the Old Testament* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999), 285.
grain, trade and income. Aside from the downturn the nation was facing, there was an added an imposition of taxes and tribute by the Assyrians, as they rose to be the dominant power in the region at the time around mid and late 8th Century B.C.12 Of all these relentless destructions, turmoil and stressful situations the people were facing, Micah identifies the true enemies of the people. He declares that the kings and priests are cannibals (3:2-3) who have stripped the flesh from the people through excessive taxation and misled them by their deceitful and corrupt leadership (3:11).13

During the uproar of political crises and upheaval situation, and lack of good and responsible leadership during the late eighth century, large landowners and wealthy individuals took the chance to prey upon small farmers.14 They snatched out their land for debt, they took away their holdings, and deprived them of their covenantal inheritance (2:1-2, 8-9). The prideful and powerful took advantage of the poor and got whatever they wanted from them either legally or illegally (2:1-3; 8-9; 7:3). Micah criticized them sharply that God will judge such people and they will find themselves without (2:4-5; 7:4b). Moreover, the rich men of the city were full of violence and used a false light weight to balance the amount of a product they sold and a false heavy weight to balance when purchasing the product (6:11). The strong and rich were able to oppress the weak and poor because no effective system of justice was enforced.15 Thus, the rich became richer while the poor became poorer. The gap between the rich and poor grew bigger and


14 Ibid.

bigger. As a result, social relations worsened in the community of God’s people. There was no equality, leading to injustice and violence that were common in the society as they governed social relations. As a consequence of their evil attitude and actions, people could not trust even their neighbors, friends and family members (7:5-6).

Most of Micah’s denouncements address the upper class people in the society such as heads, rulers, and leaders (3:1, 9,11), prophets, seers, diviners, priests (3:5, 7, 11) and the rich people (6:12) because the leadership of their society was weakened and decayed by corruption and impunity. The political and judicial leaders themselves, who were primarily responsible for administering social order and ensuring that justice prevailed in the society, perverted justice and corrupted the government. They were obsessed with power and sought support for their conduct. They exploited the system for their personal gain. It became a tyranny of self-serving administrators. Instead of establishing justice, they took advantage of the poor and did not protect their rights. When the courts and the persons that were meant to give justice were overtaken by injustice and greediness, the situation of the society was almost hopeless. Hence, power and justice had become separated while these two must be connected in building a just and healthy society.

Prophet Micah vividly describes this moral corruption and perversion of justice which upper class people brought into the society and perpetuated this way: they did not even know justice but they hated good and loved evil instead (3:1-2); they detested justice and perverted everything that is right and they built Zion with bloodshed and Jerusalem with violent injustice (3:9-10). Moreover, their heartless cruelty and merciless

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lifestyle are portrayed hyperbolically this way, “they tear off the skin from God’s people and their flesh from off their bones, they eat the flesh of God’s people and flay their skin from off them, and break their bones in pieces and chop them up like meat in a pot, like flesh in a kettle” (3:2-3). These leaders took pleasure in life at the expense of the people they oppressed, and they enjoyed plundering the poor and the powerless.

As Peacock has said, all the crimes committed by Israel have “both social and theological implications. Socially, the rich and powerful landlords were destroying the fabric of the Israelite community through their greed. Theologically, they believed that the land belonged to anyone who had the power to take it.”\(^1\) They forgot that the land had always belonged to God (Lev. 25:23), and Israelites as a covenant community were but stewards of the land in order to serve Yahweh with it. They have also ignored that God’s law forbids cheating and plundering a neighbor (Lev.5:20-23; Deut. 24:14; 28:33, Lev.19:13).

### Religious and Moral Context

According to Birch’s observation, the kings especially in the eighth and seventh century period are evaluated by biblical historians not based on their political, military, or economic prowess, but on their religious behavior. For instance, what the historian adjudges for most kings was, “He did what was evil in the sight of the Lord” (2 Kings 21:2).\(^2\) The nation’s religious and moral condition seemed highly dependent on the king’s religious conduct either good or bad. As in the time of Micah’s prophetic period,

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\(^2\) Birch et al., *A Theological Introduction to the Old Testament*, 284.
while King Jotham and Hezekiah received a relatively good press, King Ahaz, on the other hand, received his reputation as a bad and ungodly king who promotes the worship of Molech and child sacrifices and fails to trust God to protect the nation and turns to pagan nations (2 Kgs. 16:1-4; 2 Chr. 28:1-4). He set up idolatrous altars in Jerusalem and sacrificed to the idol gods of Damascus who had defeated him, and closed the doors of the Temple (2 Chron.18:23-25).

Moreover, as a result of the impression the King had from the religion of the Assyrians, he replaced the bronze altar of the temple with the new Assyrian altar (2Kgs. 16: 10-18). This act itself, as Dempster calls it, was “sacrilege, the equivalent of replacing a cross in a central position in a Christian church with a statue of a Buddha or a totem.”

This was the beginning of the decline of the nation’s religious and moral conditions and the downfall of the nation as a whole. Many of the same social policies and corrupt religious practices in the culture remained in place until the time of King Hezekiah. It was a time of oppression of the poor by the rich and powerful as well as religious syncretism.

The religious leaders—prophets, priest, seers and diviners—of this time were no different from political leaders—judges, rulers, and heads. Micah charged them with the crime of indifference to reality. They perverted God’s word by exercising their tasks for their own gain and by using their God-given talent for their personal profit only (3:11). The priests teach for a price and the prophets practice divination for money (3:11), perhaps because “the tithes to the temple were not being received, since for a time the

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19 Dempster, Micah, 11.
20 Dempster, 12.
regular temple worship had ceased under Ahaz and syncretistic religious idolatry had crept in.”  

Hence, it was also a period of spiritual and moral decline. Since they wanted to impress the people, prophets only preached of God’s love, not on his wrath, and only presented half of the truth. Likewise, the people also wanted to focus only upon the parts of God’s character that they liked (2:6) and ignored the part they did not like. Only empty falsehoods are acceptable to a blinded people (2:11). The prophets led God’s people astray by proclaiming “peace” for their personal gain (3:5), they perverted worship by practicing outward rituals without any inward seriousness of purpose (6:6-7).

Even though they were responsible to make sure that political leaders do their duty of establishing justice to protect the rights of the disadvantaged people, they feigned blindness to the injustice political leaders were doing in order to earn their goodwill. Moreover, these prophets and priests invented “religious justifications for the conduct of kings and leaders,” that worsen the condition of the society in every area and made the situation almost hopeless.

While leaders of both political and religious positions were supposed to exercise and promote justice and righteousness in the society, they have gone far away from it. They love evil and hate good instead of loving justice and kindness (hesed) and covenant loyalty (3:2-3; 6:8). Their deeds have caused evil (3:4). While political leaders were perverting justice, the religious leaders were distorting God’s word leading the people to a false worship. They have abused their power in the wrong way; they have corrupted the

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nations with their malicious acts and attitudes that contaminated the whole society. They have ignored and deserted the fact that the “criterion for good leadership was in the context of a covenant bond with Yahweh.”

The Role of the Prophet

In times of crisis like this, prophets played a very important role: “a vehicle for the word of God in history.” Their lives or who they were was not as important as what they had to say. As Dempster has said, “Their words have been preserved not because of their elegant rhetoric or political astuteness but because they were also the words of the living God.” This statement also holds true for prophet Micah. At such a time like this, it is very crucial that he communicated God’s message and will accurately to God’s people in whatever situation. He was to communicate whatever God’s word said and whatever God’s will was, whether he liked it or not, whether the people want to hear and heed it or not. The message could be a woe oracle, disputation, salvation, hope, judgment, lawsuit or lament; regardless, he had to communicate it. He had no option. It was his primary task to proclaim what no one likes to hear.

He was to speak of God’s message to whomever God addressed, such as all the peoples of the earth (1:2), oppressors (2:1), heads, rulers (3:1, 9, 11), prophets (3:5, 11), seers and diviners (3:7), priests (3:11) and the rich (6:12) without bias. According to

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24 “It implied an obligation to ensure that justice was done and people’s rights protected. The king in particular was charged with justice to disempowered people such as widows and orphans: their rights to such things as land ownership and a free and peaceful way of life. Prophets and priests were supposed to ensure that leaders did their duty in these matters.” Ibid., 46.


26 Ibid., 4.
Kline, the prophet as a covenant mediator and representative of God has four distinctive missions to accomplish:

- To proclaim the sovereign name of the Covenant Lord- Yahweh, the Creator, the Lord of hosts;
- To recite the saving acts of God in the history of his relationship with Israel;
- To reiterate interpretively the obligations God’s covenant has imposed, calling into view Israel’s rebellious ways;
- To confront the sinful nation with the curses threatened in the covenant agreement text and ratification rite, while renewing promises of God’s grace.  

It was almost certain that to receive such a gripping message of verdict on the nation must have been a striking revelation to Micah himself, and to pass on this message precisely could have been the most difficult task as it could have endangered his very own life. Yet, in order to accomplish this unpopular and tough task, Micah was equipped and empowered by Yahweh physically, spiritually, emotionally, mentally and morally and was filled with the Spirit, power, justice and courage (3:8). Without the help and empowerment of the Holy Spirit, this kind of task is likely impossible to accomplish.

Hence, God always supplies his messenger the tools, the help, the grace, and equipment that he would need to accomplish his God-given mission. In fact, Micah was courageous enough to be recognized as “the first to announce the destruction of Jerusalem and the sacred temple, the sign of God’s presence and blessing among his people” (3:8-12).  

In his role as a prophet, Micah represents the feelings of the rural farmers and villagers who were being robbed violently and his concerns go out for justice and the plight of the poor and the oppressed living in misery (3:1-4). As Micah saw the

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27 Meredith G. Kline, The Structure of Biblical Authority (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1972), 59.

28 Dempster, Micah, 8.
social and moral decay around him and his entire society falling apart (7:1-6), it moved him to his deepest being.

The Brief Literary Context of the Book of Micah

It had been observed that the book of Micah is generally organized into three major divisions having alternating sections of judgment and salvation oracles:

   Salvation of the Remnant (2:12ff)
b. Judgment of Judah’s Leaders (3:1-12)
   Judah’s Future Hope (4:1-5:15)
   Restoration of God’s people (7:8-20) 29

As Barker observes, “With this structure each major section opens with a summons to ‘hear’ and a specification of the addressee.” 30 Like other prophetic books, the book of Micah is comprised of different literary forms. The judgment sections are composed of divine covenant lawsuits (1:2-7; 3:1-4; 6:1-16), laments (1:8-16; 7:1-7), woe and judgment oracles (2:1-5; 3:9, 12), and disputation literary forms (2:6-11; 3:5-8). The salvation sections are composed of salvation oracles (2:12-13; 5:5-15), an eschatological salvation oracle (4:1-8), a mixed judgment and salvation oracle (4:9-5:4) and a prophetic liturgy (7:8-20). 31 In order to have an easier and more comprehensible grasp of the chosen passage, it is outlined more like a lawsuit form according to the following:


- A description of the Judgment scene (v.1)
- Appointed witnesses: mountains and foundations of the earth (v.2)
- Accusation in question form to the defendant (v.3)
- Recitation of God’s saving acts in Israel’s History (vv.4-5)
- People’s misunderstanding of worship (vv.6-7)
- The kind of worship God truly desires (v.8)
It had been made known to the people of Israel that the purpose of God’s redemption from their slavery in Egypt was that they would “worship/serve” God exclusively. Their worship was to be expressed not just in the sanctuary but in the whole of life. Neither the matter of worship in the sanctuary nor the matter of everyday life outside the sanctuary can be neglected. However, the people of Israel failed God in keeping up with their covenantal relationship with him. Far from being obedient to the ways of God, they became unfaithful and rebellious to God’s given responsibility. They lost their real identity and purpose God has for them. Corruption was everywhere and justice has been paralyzed. Mercy, compassion and solidarity could hardly be seen in society. Even their intentions of bringing surplus offerings and sacrifices became a remedy of some sort to cover up their disobedient acts. During a time of uncertainty like this, God raised prophets, who risked their lives proclaiming a message of God, to intervene, to challenge their situation with the purpose to bring them back into a relationship with him. Micah’s prophetic message was one of them. It stands as a fresh reminder for people who tend to give more weight to sacred matters than to social and ethical duties that are to be displayed in personal and communal relationship.

Translation of the Text

V.1 Hear now what the LORD is saying,

“Stand up, make your case before the mountains.
And let the hills hear your voice.

V.2 Listen, you mountains, to the lawsuit of the LORD,
   And you everlasting foundations of the earth,
   For the LORD has a lawsuit with His people;
   And He will plead with Israel.

V.3 My people, what have I done to you?
   And how have I made you weary? Testify against me!

V.4 Surely, I brought you up from the land of Egypt
   And from out of the house of slavery I redeemed you.
   And I sent before you Moses, Aaron, and Miriam.

V.5 My people, remember now
   What Balak, king of Moab, counseled
   And what Balaam son of Boer answered him from Shittim to Gilgal,
   In order that you many know the righteousness of the LORD.”

V.6 With what shall I meet the LORD
   And bow myself before God on high?
   Shall I meet him with whole burnt offerings, with calves a year old?

V.7 Would the LORD be pleased with thousand of rams,
   With ten thousand of rivers of oil?
   Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression,
   The fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?

V.8 He has told you, O man, what is good;
   And what does the LORD seek out of you?
But to do justice, to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God.

**Verse by Verse Exegesis of the Text**

**A Description of the Judgment Scene (v. 1)**

The verse begins with a prophetic formula, “Hear now what the LORD is saying” without identifying the addressees (v.1a). The use of the first masculine plural in the verb שִׁמֵּעַ suggests that the verse could be a continuation from chapter 3-5 where the same verb שִׁמֵּעַ was used to address “the elders of Jacob.”¹ According to Waltke, the use of “my people” in vv. 3, 5 of the present text somehow makes it clear that, this one is addressed against “Israel as a nation.”² Thus, the oracle “Hear now what the Lord is saying” can be understood as a prophet’s call upon the people of Israel to prepare them for the drama that follows. The use of the participle אֹמֵר ‘says/saying’ functions as “a predicate of the verbless objective clause emphasizes the durative circumstance.”³ Therefore, it can also be assumed that this prophetic message is still relevant today as it was for Israel and is still as fresh as before.

Micah shapes his prophecy as a courtroom Covenant-Lawsuit brought by the Lord against his people Israel in order to settle a dispute between them⁴ The issue before the

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³ Ibid., 344.

⁴ Waltke, *A Commentary on Micah*, differentiates this accusation from the accusations in chapters 2 and 3 this way, “Whereas those accusations were addressed to the venal land barons (chapter 2) and
court will be the charge of the Lord, as the plaintiff, that the people of Israel, as the defendants, have breached their covenant with him. We see there are the two imperative verbs קום ‘stand up’ andRib ‘make a case’ in v.1b, stressing an urgency of the trial.

Waltke suggests that it is God’s speaking to the prophet to “arise” as his representative to set forth his case before the mountains/hills. On the other hand, Andersen and Freedman observe that the verb קום ‘stand up’ is often used as “the first verb in a call for action, continually used in prayers to God to arise and go into action as warrior or judge (Num. 10:35; Ps.3:8).” Thus, it is likely as Andersen and Freedman suggest, that this is “the prophet’s calling upon Yahweh, the central figure, to engage in disputation because as in v2 it is Yahweh who has the case (rib) with his people.

Appointed Witnesses: Mountains and Foundations of the Earth (v. 2)

The hills, the mountains and the enduring foundations of the earth, are summoned to listen to the indictment of the Lord against his people and to serve as witnesses. In doing so, as Wolff states, “both the topmost and bottommost boundary of the earth” are put together here as witnesses because they are imperturbable, constant, immutable, have existed long ago and the most dependable witnesses in contrast to God’s people. Their role in this courtroom Covenant-Lawsuit is to have witnessed the original covenant which the Lord initiated and made with his people because they know very well the history and

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Israel’s corrupt leadership (chapter 3), this one is addressed against Israel as a nation, ‘my people’ (vv. 3, 5); and whereas those oracles aimed to condemn and sentence, this one aims to restore” (374).


the agreements made between God and his people Israel. In fact, they happened to be the witnesses God used to call upon against Israel when the original covenant was made (Deut 4:26; 30:19; 31:28; 32:1). Additionally, the presence of these witnesses heightens the seriousness of the judgment scene.

The fact that the dispute is not between enemies but a disagreement among allies is justified by the following analysis. The pronominal suffix in the phrase וֹמּעַם “with his people” indicates possession—God’s own people. The meaning of the word עַם itself is significant in the context of covenant because it has a sense of agnate or blood relative as a newly established kinship relationship (Lev. 26:12). With the suffix it stresses the intimate bond between God and his people. Hence, this special, intimate and mutual relationship between God and Israel is the ground upon which God bases his right to enter into judgment.

God does have a ground and the very right to bring a charge against Israel because they are chosen by him, redeemed by his mighty hands from their slavery and given the Promised Land. In fact, “their very existence and history is God’s work and their supreme obligation in life is to actualize God’s sovereignty over them.” As they become the people of God, they are expected to live as God’s covenant people in their daily lives because their status comes with obligations. If they want to keep their status,  

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they have to toe the line. However, they did not fulfill their covenant obligations. Hence, God, as the aggrieved party, has an accusation and initiates the trial with his people, Israel.

Accusation in Question Form to the Defendant (v. 3)

As the aggrieved party, God has the right to be angry with his people who have betrayed him and he could have attacked and confronted them aggressively. Yet, God uses a vocative expression “My people” v3. His question shows tenderness, the loving way of God wanting to renew the covenant relationship.13 As Wolff observes, “the subject of the legal proceeding is not about Israel’s guilt, but Yahweh’s deeds and demands.”14

God protests with a common question, “My people, what have I done to you?” v3. According to Van Groningen, “עַמִּי is ‘my people’ is first used by the Lord in Ex. 3:7 as he identified himself with them by means of the covenant.”15 Again the pronominal suffix on the noun עַמִּי is a possessive pronoun and it justifies the people belonging to God. In his opening question, the Lord turns the situation on his head by asking them, ‘what have I done against you? The use of the verb עָשָׂה “do, make” with God as subject has a theological value stressing both God’s transcendent and immanent nature because it refers frequently to God’s acts in the sphere of history.16 The verb is used here with a

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14 Wolff, Micah, 174.

15 Van Groningen, TWOT 2:676.

preposition of disadvantage which marks the person against whom an action is directed. Hence, this question probably goes this way, “What evil thing(s) have I done against you?” According to Wolff, this question is “identical with ‘What is my guilt?’ (lSam 20:1), in the course of legal proceedings, this question is asked by a person who sees himself charged with some wrong.” Moreover, Anderson and Freedman also make their point by saying that the words here “sound like a response to some prior complaint on Israel’s part, insinuating that Yahweh had been negligent or inconsistent.” It implies that the people are accusing God for acting toward their disadvantage, but the question God asks protects God’s blamelessness.

Moreover, the question continues whether God has “wearied” Israel. The root of the verb is which expresses “overload, annoyance, exhaustion (cf. Isa 1:14; Jer 12:5).” As Smith-Christopher has observed, the question is “a striking use of a relatively rare term” because a similar kind of question can be seen in other prophetic contexts, but never quite like Micah uses it here. For instance, the prophet Isaiah speaks of God being weary of their religious antics (1:14; 7:13) or the “weariness” of people who are tired of themselves from their sins (Is.16:12; Jer.9:5). Furthermore, according to Anderson and Freedman’s observation, “weariness” is a theme of Exodus, and it is

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17 B.K.Waltke and M. O’Connor, An Introduction in Biblical Hebrew Syntax, (Indiana:Winona Lake, 1990), 207. It is used in many ways though a variety of its senses are often rendered by English ‘to’ in its diverse meanings. And it can function as a of interest or (dis)advantage.

18 Wolff, Micah, 174.

19 Andersen and Freedmand, Micah: The Anchor Bible, 517.

20 Wolff, Micah, 174.

applied to Yahweh several times. Thus, it is suggested that “perhaps the idea that Yahweh has worn them out is expressed sarcastically, since it was usually the other way around.”

Now, God is asking them to answer Him back. The basic meaning of the verb "respond/react" could be best translated as “witness/testify” in the context of a lawsuit. In fact, it is “a technical term of forensic language probably derives from its use in the context of negotiations and disputes, for the verbal response expressed by "can be evoked by an experience, a perception, or an event.” Hence the more precise translation of the clause must be “testify against me” as the preposition could also function adversatively. It sounds like God has challenged them to defend their complaints and to substantiate their charge against him. Thus, the suggested “sarcasm” seems complete as the demanding question for the answer.

Recitation of God’s saving Acts in Israel’s History (vv. 4-5)

Verses 4-5 recite God’s saving acts in the history of Israel, covering from exodus to the conquest of the land. This recitation is significant in many different ways for the covenant people of God. It justifies what God claims about Israel in the possessive pronoun of “my people” (vv. 3, 5). It reminds the people of their origin, how they became the covenant people and what their obligations are as the covenant people of God. Indeed, according to the understanding of the prophets, “Israel’s history begins with an act of redemption (Amos 2:10, 3:1, 9:7; Hos. 2:15, 11:1, 12:9, 13, 13:4; Jer. 2:6, 7:22, 25, 11:4,

22 Andersen and Freedman, the Anchor Bible, 518.


7; Ezk. 20:5f.; Isa 11:16, 52:4, 63:11). This event is referred to so frequently as the starting-point and basis of the national development.”

In verse 4, God’s initial saving act is stressed by using the conjunction כִּי “surely” which functions as an asseverative to emphasize “a surety of a fact or situation.” Hence, God’s saving acts to deliver Israel out of Egypt are not just a product of religious imagination but they are a concrete historical fact which they always have to remember. Here Micah portrays skillfully the contrast between the people’s accusation against God’s deeds and the reality of God’s righteous deeds in their history by a very interesting play on words between חָפָזוּת “I burdened you” and חָפַל “I brought you up.” This play could have sounded to Israel something like this: “How have I overburdened you? . . . I have rather unburdened you!’ or ‘How have I pressed you down? . . . I have rather brought you up!’”

The verb הֵよく means “bring up” in its Hiphil form with a causative sense. Yahweh has caused the Israelites to come from out of Egypt where they were in slavery. The verb is in the perfect tense with a double focus on past events and present state and signifies a state of movement from an earlier situation. This movement is vividly clear by the preposition מִן used in the ablative sense “designating movement away from a specified

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Hence, not only did God bring Israel out of Egypt, but up and far away from their status of slavery to the people of God. Because of what God did, they are who they are and what they are now. Their state of being has been changed because of God’s righteous deeds.

Additionally, the second action verb, פּדה “redeem” puts more weight on God’s righteous deeds. It means to “free someone who is bound by legal or cultic obligation by the payment of its equal value or a transfer of ownership through the payment of a price” (Ex. 13:13; 34:20; Lev. 27:27). In the exodus event, regarding this payment of a price, Mays states that “no price other than Yahweh’s investment of self in intervention is in view.” Yahweh has redeemed Israel out of the house of bondage in Egypt to be his own people. Now Israel has a new owner who redeemed them from the house of slavery. The phrase “I am the LORD your God who redeemed you from the house of slavery” (cf. Deut. 5:6; 6:12; 7: 8; 8:14; 13:6, 11; Josh 24:15; Judg. 6:8; Jer. 34:13) entitled God the right to speak as master over Israel.

Moreover, God שׁלח “sent” before them a trio of important leaders: Moses, Aaron, and Miriam. Though we do not know what point exactly Micah is trying to make sense here by presenting the three siblings in a joint leadership, we do know that his recognition of their leadership role in Exodus is entirely positive. Of course, they were strikingly different from the leaders, judges, priests, and prophets of Micah’s days. Moses served as

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29 Ibid., 212.

30 Waltke, A Commentary on Micah, 381.

31 Mays, Micah, 134.

32 Waltke, A Commentary on Micah, 381.
the administrator and judge of all the people (Deut. 1:12) and taught all the commands, decrees and laws (Deut. 4:14; 5:31); Aaron, the high priest, removed their religious burdens and brought reconciliation to the people (Ex. 28:12) and also taught all the decrees the Lord had given (Lev. 10:11); Miriam serves as a key character in her care for her baby brother, and as the prophetess instructed the women (Ex. 15:20-21). All of them served Israel sacrificially, judged them fairly and led them selflessly. Wolff’s articulation on the word לפני “before you” is noteworthy, as it “recalls not only the ancient historical data, but also the tradition that provides orientation for the present.”

Moses, Aaron, and Miriam, who were once sent as Israel’s leaders, even down to the present time prepare the way for God’s mission.

In verse 5, the Lord calls them to זכר “remember” what Balak king of Moab planned against Israel—to curse them by Balaam, the seer (Num 22-24); and what Balaam answered—instead of cursing Israel, he blessed them according to Yahweh’s direction (22:18; 23:12, 26). Shittim and Gilgal here stand as historic places for Israel in their salvation history. Shittim was their last camp of the wilderness wandering and Gilgal was their first foothold in the Promised Land. The book of Joshua recorded how Israel crossed the Jordan miraculously (3:1, 11, 14, 16f; 4:1, 5, 7, 10-13, 20ff; 5:1). The verb זכר in this context means “to recall the past and confront it as present reality, to live

33 Waltke, A Commentary on Micah, 381.
34 Andersen and Freedman, Micah: The Anchor Bible, 522.
35 Wolff, Micah, 175–6.
36 Andersen and Freedman, 523.
and think by events whose force continues from the past into the present.”

Waltke summarizes it profoundly this way: “memory entails faith and actualizes the past into the present.”

Hence, remembering God’s redemptive and guiding actions provides orientation for the present for God’s people in order to move them into obeying his commands out of gratitude for his benevolent acts and it will enable them to correct the misdeeds in their lives.

The result clause instructing them to remember God’s saving history is introduced by the conjunction מַעַן meaning “so that/in order to,” thus, read “so that God’s people may know the righteousness of the Lord” (6:5c). This remembrance will make them know that God is righteous and that he did not wrong them. The noun צדָקָה is the plural construct form of צדָק “righteousness” which can be translated “righteous acts or saving acts” of God. In fact, Yahweh’s righteousness is expressed in His salvation of Israel, and his fulfillment of his covenant with them.

In short, these verses command Israel to recall their redemption, the saving acts of God for his people. It was God who delivered them when they could do nothing against an empire that had all the power.

People’s Misunderstanding of Worship (vv. 6-7)

In vv.6-7, 1st person singular is used with no identified speaker, assuming the speaker as “a representative Israelite.” Burkitt, quoted by Anderson and Freedman, identified the speaker as “the earnest but ignorant settler in Palestine who knows nothing

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37 Mays, Micah, 135.
38 Waltke, A Commentary on Micah, 383.
39 Waltke, 357.
of the religion of Elijah and Amos.”

The inquiry uses the language of cult starts with “with what.” The quantity of offerings is rich, extravagant, and horrifying perhaps. It is clear at this point that the people of Israel do not remember anything, and as a result they try to approach God with the lists of all possible offerings as, may be, a remedy. The people go about “with historical amnesia, without the slightest desire or interest in remembering and recognizing what God had done for them in the past.” Israel’s blindness and the level of ignorance is incredible because they think that offering excessive, costly and elaborate sacrifices are what God requires them to do in searching his favor.

The first verb קדם “to meet” appearing in the Piel form initially signifies “a meeting between persons (Deut. 23:5; Isa 21:14). Though it has same meaning with reference to God ‘to come before’ is best rendered because of the different social status between God and man.”

Hence, in this context the use of קדם reminds us the image of Jacob preparing gifts for Esau in order to earn his favor and acceptance (Gen. 32:13-33:10). The story here pictures very well how the people of God are seeking to mollify God’s anger against them by offering ever more costly sacrifices. Out of full blindness, they think God’s favor is something they can buy or earn through costly and elaborate offerings as a solution to fulfill their covenant obligations. The second verb כפף “to bow

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40 Andersen and Freedman, 523.
42 Waltke, A Commentary on Micah, 358.
43 Ibid., 387.
oneself” in Niphal describes “a person in an attitude of deep humility who, self-abased at prayer, bows down his/her whole body before God on high.”

The question of with what one should come before God now receives its first concrete answer, the עֹלָה “whole burnt-offering” in v6b. In all OT periods, the עֹלָה is a sacrifice in which the entire animal of the offering is consumed by fire on the altar and sent up to God expressing the ascent of the soul in worship. It is the essential element of OT worship, as a sacrificial offering to the Lord (Lev. 1:2) and for atonement (Lev. 1:4). As Smith observes, Burnt offerings represents “total dedication” to God. Moreover, the next answer ‘calves a year old’ is also a demand by God for a sin offering (Lev.9:3), and it represents the most desirable kind of sacrificial animal.

Verse 7 continues to find an answer of what would be pleasing and acceptable to God, and comes out with ‘thousands of rams’ and ‘ten thousand rivers of olive oil.’ Apparently, God never asked them for such sacrifices and offerings. In OT history, these kinds of offerings have been done twice: once by King Solomon out of gratitude and once by King Hezekiah (I Kgs. 3:4; 8:5, 63, II Chr. 29:32). The ten thousand rivers of oil is “an absolutely excessive amount of oil to be sacrificed by an individual and it departs from all units of measurement that are customary in the cult (Num. 28:5; 15:9; Ex. 30:24).” Thus, these excessive numbers of offering represent “lavish sacrifice.”

44 Wolff, Micah, 177.
47 Wolff, Micah, 178.
Finally, the list of possibilities reaches its climax proposing the offering of the ‘firstborn’—the might, the first-fruit of the strength of the father, preeminent in dignity and power (Gen. 49:3; Deut 21:17). According to the cultic law, the first offspring from every womb belongs to God; if it is not offered, it must be redeemed and all the firstborn sons are to be redeemed (Ex. 34:19-20; Lev. 27:26f.). Moreover, the practice of offering the firstborn sons is plainly prohibited in Deuteronomy and the Holiness Code, and is considered a non-YHWHistic practice (Deut. 18:10; Lev. 18:21; 20:2-5). Though, it is being proposed as an offer, the tone here, as Anderson and Freedman observed, is “far from indicating cruelty or callousness of parent towards child, but the action gained poignancy and efficacy.”49 In fact, as the child was treasured, it represents the person’s most valuable possession.50

As Smith suggests, the implied answer to all of these proposed questions is that “none of these things is required.”51 However, it does not mean that the whole sacrificial system and cultic worship is non-required. In fact, sacrifices were required in Mosaic Law (Lev. 1-6). The implied meaning here is, “not that sacrifice was wrong, but in and of itself without a proper relationship to God and neighbor, it is useless.”52 The important thing to take note here is that all these sacrifices are rejected not because they are wrong or evil but because of the worshipers (Mic. 3:4, 12; Amos 5:21-24; Isa 1:10-17; 58:1-7; Ps 15; Prov. 15:8; 21:3, 27; 1 Sam 15:20-23; Gen. 4:3-6). Basically, their cultic lives and ethical lives are dichotomized. Without an ethical and moral life, worship is meaningless.

49 Anderson and Freedman, The Anchor Bible, 524.

50 Ibid., 524.


52 Ibid., 51.
As Alfaro profoundly comments, “God does not want sacrifices except the sacrifice of self through the life of justice, so that no person will be sacrificed or victimized. The most expensive and elaborate worship cannot compensate for the lack of justice.”

The Kind of Worship God Truly Desires (v. 8)

God has no interest in the list of their proposals for increasingly costly sacrifices. Hence his response is silence about sacrifices. Instead, as we see in v.8 that the response deals with “how” man should approach the Lord, while the questions deal with “with what.” This verse compactly and profoundly summarizes what the Lord wants to see persistently in the life of those who worship him. It has much more to do with “the quality of life to be lived” than the offering of elaborate sacrifices. It is important to take note that how they live their lives is no less important than what they offer and bring to God in worship. The perfect tense in the beginning of the verse—“He has told”—suggests that “the declaration belongs to tradition and one needs only to be reminded.”

The fact that it is not new to them suggests that God’s people have no excuse that they do not know what God requires of them and seeks in their lives. The speaker’s use of the addressee, as the generic אָדָם ‘Adam,’ is a little puzzling here. Anderson and Freedman notice that it is “an unusual way to address either an individual or the people of Israel as the usual Hebrew term for humankind is “sons of Adam,” an expression that derives from

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54 Voth, “What does God Expect of Us?,” 305.

the identity of the first man.”

They further suggest that the use of the generic Adam “gives the response the universal application.”

On the other hand, Mays suggests that the generic use of “Adam” in a vocative position reflects “the generalizing and paradigmatic intention of the saying as a whole which is meant for any member of the covenant community.”

Whatever the case, one thing that is sure is that it gives the reaffirmation of what has always been known and what one should know in a simple, but powerful term; what is good and what the Lord requires. According to Anderson and Freedman, the use of the term 'good' in this verse is best understood in “its comparative meaning; implied that the proposed sacrifices in v.7 is good, but the one in v.8 is ‘better.’”

Similar example can be found in I Sam 15:22, which said “to obey is better than sacrifice.” Furthermore, according to Bowling, the meaning of the root of טוֹב can be noted in “five general areas: 1) practical, economic, or material good, 2) abstract goodness such as desirability, pleasantness, and beauty, 3) quality or expense, 4) moral goodness, and 5) technical philosophical good.”

Therefore, the meaning of this word טוֹב encompasses all the spheres of human being.

To do justice: The very first fundamental moral value God continually seeks in the life of his people is to do justice. The verb ‘do’ in Hebrew is עָשָׂה which can refer to the carrying

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56 Andersen and Freedman, 526.
57 Andersen and Freedman, 527.
58 May, Micah, 141.
59 Andersen and Freedman, 528.
60 Andrew Bowling, “טוֹב,” TWOT 1:345.
out of God’s commands in terms of fulfilling them and translating them into action.⁶¹

Every individual member of the covenant community is required to do/carry out מִשָּׁפָט ‘justice’ in their daily relationship with God and others. Perhaps מִשָּׁפָט, as the object of עשָה, should be understood as a law in which the will of God is manifested for the society in this context. In fact, God’s will in giving them a law is that there will be peace and order in society as it “provides the standard for right behavior in social relationships.”⁶² Justice establishes equity especially for the powerless, and restores the damaged order of a community by punishing the wicked oppressor and delivering the innocent and the oppressed.

According to Mott, מִשָּׁפָט “is not mere alleviation; it sets people back on their feet, restores them to community, and ends oppression (Ps 10:15-18; 68:5-10).”⁶³ This task of restoring community order should be understood “not only as a one-time act but also as a continuous activity, as a constant preservation of the ‘peace’ שלום.”⁶⁴ Hence the duty to do מִשָּׁפָט is “not only to obey the commandments but also to establish with a partner a relationship conformed to the ideal of the covenant established by God.”⁶⁵

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⁶³ Ibid., 438.


The concret expression of doing מִשׁפָּט is found first in God’s activity in terms of caring for the poor, the widow, the orphan and the alien, and feeding the hunger and clothing the naked (Deut. 10:18; Ps 82:3; Isa 58-59). Moreover, this action is “repeatedly associated with the language of deliverance (Ps. 76:9) describing the deliverance of people from political and economic oppression (Jdg. 5:11), slavery (1 Sam. 12:7), and captivity (Jer. 51:10).”

God’s people are called to do likewise. The range of this practice is not to be limited to legal administration but is as wide as the range of all human relations. As the message is addressed to every individual member of the society, the responsibility of doing מִשׁפָּט is for every individual member of the society by reflecting God’s saving acts that have been manifested to them.

To love חֶסֶד: The second fundamental moral value God requires of his people is to love חֶסֶד. The term חֶסֶד has a subtly nuanced and multifaceted English translation—mercy, love, faithfulness, kindness, loyalty, steadfast love, unfailing love, covenant love, love, goodness, grace and compassion. Routledge cites Glueck, who defines חֶסֶד as “conduct in accord with a mutual relationship of rights and duties, corresponding to a mutually obligatory relationship.”

Thus, Glueck’s definition and the varied English translations of the word חֶסֶד suggest that חֶסֶד has active, relational and mutually obligatory aspects. Hence the word encompasses both the action and the attitude from which the action emerges. Because of its active nature, חֶסֶד is something visible, and it can be


experienced. For instance, Lot saw and experienced the חֶסֶד of the Lord when he was saved from the fire from heaven (Gen. 19:19). Rahab asked the Israelite spies to spare and deliver her life and the lives of her father’s household as a demonstration of חֶסֶד to her and her family (Josh. 2:12-13). Hence, the act of חֶסֶד spares, delivers and protects life from danger and death. It preserves or promotes life by interfering on behalf of someone suffering misfortune or distress.\(^{68}\) The act of חֶסֶד is performed not to harm but to benefit people who are in need.

Moreover, חֶסֶד is used most concretely in relationships among humans. Naturally, the stage for the demonstration of חֶסֶד belongs to the sphere of human interpersonal relations such as between husband and wife (Gen. 20:13), between father and son (Gen. 47:29), between other relatives (Gen. 24:49; 1 Sam 15:6; Ruth 2:20), between host and guest (Gen. 19:19;21:23; Josh. 2:12, 14), between friends (1 Sam. 20:8; 2 Sam. 16:17), between a king and his subjects (2 Sam. 2:5; 3:8) and between two parties, inaugurated by an unusual act of kindness on the part of one (Gen. 40:14; Jdg. 8:35).\(^{69}\) In addition, as stated by Routledge, Hesed also describes proper behavior towards others within the community of God’s people (Ps.109:16; Is. 57:1; Mic. 6:8; Zc.7:9). Thus, he further expresses hesed as “an attitude and the corresponding action which arises out of, and is in accordance with the norms of, particular social bonds.”\(^{70}\) Hence, in the community of


\(^{69}\) Ibid., 46-7.

\(^{70}\) Routledge, “Hesed as Obligation,” 181.
God’s people חֶסֶד is doing a good or proper thing by protecting and helping those who are in need through a heart of kindness and benevolence.

Finally, the act of חֶסֶד in human relationships has a mutually obligatory aspect. According to Zobel, “it is often stated expressly that the one who receives an act of חֶסֶד responds with a similar act of חֶסֶד, or at least that the one who demonstrates חֶסֶד is justified in expecting an equivalent act in return.”⁷¹ Rahab, for instance, has a right to ask the reward for her act of חֶסֶד to the Israelite spies (Josh. 2:12). She expects חֶסֶד to be shown to her and her father’s household. To return חֶסֶד that has been received is an ethical requirement imposed on mankind by God in relationships among humans, and failure to do so results in divine punishment.⁷² For instance, the sons of Israel did not show חֶסֶד to the household of Gideon in accord with all the good that he had done to Israel and God returned all of their wickedness on their heads (Jdg. 8:35; 9:16-20, 56-57). Thus, people are socially and morally obliged to respond in kind to the חֶסֶד they have received.

Most important of all, this חֶסֶד itself is “a characteristic of God that is rooted in divine nature” reported by Routledge.⁷³ The evidence of this is seen in the book of Exodus, which represents the summary of the attributes of God; “The LORD, the LORD,⁷¹ Zobel, *TDOT* 10:47.

⁷² Ibid., 49.

⁷³ “out of 282 occurrences of hased in the Bible, 187 have God as an agent” (Routledge, Robin L. “Hesed as Obligation: A Re-Examination.” *TynBul* 46 (1995): 186)
the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love (*hesed*), and faithfulness (34:6).” Routledge, furthermore, mentions that this *hesed* has significant implications for the relationship between God and his covenant people. God’s *חֶסֶד* represent his continued faithfulness and love towards his covenant people, his devotion to them in spite of their faithlessness, and his gracious bearing with his people’s failure; seeking actively the continuance of the union in the face of all that threatens it. 74 This *חֶסֶד* as the very nature of God is vividly portrayed by the prophet Micah himself at the closing of his prophecy in a magnificent hymn extolling God’s greatness (7:18-20).

Now, this *חֶסֶד* as the character displayed by God towards his people, is now to be reflected in the lives of his people together (Jer. 9:23), and all the members of God’s covenant community are to show *חֶסֶד* in their relationships with one another (Hos. 12:6; Mic 6:8; Zec.7:9). 75 Fulfilling this duty-bound *חֶסֶד* by corresponding to right behavior toward others ensure a well-ordered society which is the God-given norm. Therefore, the *חֶסֶד* required by God is deeds of kindness, mercy and justice, demonstrated in the act of promoting, preserving, protecting and delivering lives, to other members of the community as a response to the deeds of *חֶסֶד* that God has shown to them (6:4-5).

To walk humbly with your God: Micah now moves from covenant solidarity between humans to the covenant solidarity with God. The people must walk with God, as he had done so with them in their toughest journey by showing himself watchful and attentive to

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74 Routledge, Robin L. “*Ḥesed as Obligation: A Re-Examination,*” 193.

75 Ibid., 195.
the needs of the people and listening to the cries of their heart. According to Helfmeyer, the verb הַלֵּה ‘to walk’ has “both concrete spatial meaning and a metaphorical meaning in the sense to ‘live, behave, act.’” Hence it is a way of life, lifestyle and personal conduct on a journey of life. God does not want his people simply to come to him with offerings, he wants them to walk with him and live intimately with him in their daily lives. Elsewhere in the Bible, we have come across with people who had walked with God such as Enoch, Noah, and Abraham etc. (Gen. 5:22; 6:9; 45:15).

More importantly, ‘humility’ functions here as an adverb and is a required virtue in their walk with God. Although the traditional meaning of the adverb means ‘humbly’, the exact equivalent of translation seems a vague and difficult task among scholars. The exact and same root צנוע occurs as an adjective plural elsewhere in Pro.11:2: “When pride comes, then disgrace; but with the humble is wisdom.” But, its explanation doesn’t seem to appear adequate in the context of Micah here. The explanation of Waltke seems credible here. According to him, the word ‘humbly’ in the original term means “circumspectly” in the sense of “behaving discerningly, wisely, prudently.” He further explains this by quoting Stoebe, “this ought to be understood in connection with God’s saving acts in vv.3-5, and signifies a walk with God which insightfully recognizes God’s gifts and accepts the consequences that proceed from that for one’s behavior, even toward

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77 Wolff, Micah, 182.
78 Waltke, A Commentary on Micah, 394.
other human beings.” Anderson and Freedman’s explanation of the text becomes more convincing as they make it simple:

Scholars have been so preoccupied with trying to find out the meaning of the word that they have missed the simple part that is as clear as day. “Walk with your God,” whether humble or circumspectly or wisely or however, is not the main point. Walk with your God by doing justice and loving mercy.80

The need of a companion in walking humbly is made clear by the use of the preposition עִם because it expresses “the concept of inclusiveness, togetherness, company, fellowship, companionship, common experiences of suffering, prosperity etc., a common lot regardless of social status, location etc.”81 The final wordךָאֱלֹהֵי “your God” recalls “the gift-giving God who leads forward, who in his love and with his deeds of justice, is devoted to human beings.”82 With their God people may walk and find the path that leads to what is good. And in following his path, justice and love become new realities.

Indeed, their God is the God who lives and performs justice and mercy despite the people’s unloving deeds and wayward attitudes. He is the God who walked with them in their journey from Egypt to the Promised Land by listening attentively to the cries of their hearts, providing and meeting all their need and all they could possibly have asked for. Now, the people are once again reminded that they must listen to God and his desire for mercy and justice for those in needs. His people are to show justice and mercy

79 Ibid, 394.
80 Anderson and Freedman, The Anchor Bible, 560.
82 Wolff, Micah, 181.
towards the poor, needy, weak and oppressed neighbors in the same saving manner God has done to them in their history.

Therefore, the kind of worship God truly desires from his people is the life of his worshiper living in obedient and attentive to his will, agenda and plan. He has made clear that the kind of worship he desires is not just people coming into the sanctuary with numerous offerings, prayers and sacrifices. It is so much more. It is not just about how we are actively involved in Church matters and enthusiastically praise God in the service. It is also about the daily matters both inside and outside of worship in the sanctuary. In fact, God is not only the God of Sunday but also the God of Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, and so forth. God is present both in temple and everywhere else. As much as God requires and takes pleasure in seeing his people actively involved in Church matters, bringing sacrifices to him and praising him wholeheartedly also requires and anticipates that his people live a life that reflects the merciful and compassionate God in community and society, especially towards the poor, the needy, the oppressed-those who are less fortunate. Worship is not just about what the people of God do and how they act in the Church, it is much more about how they live and act in their relationship with others in community.
CHAPTER 5
THE MESSAGE OF MICAH AND ITS IMPLICATION FOR THE CHIN CHRISTIAN
COMMUNITY TODAY

Perhaps more than any other prophets, Micah defines what really is true worship and acceptable to the Lord. He vividly contrasts it with Israel’s misunderstanding of worship as merely offering enormous sacrifices. However, it is not to regard that these sacrifices in themselves are repugnant in the first place and are not required to the Lord. What Micah was challenging the people of his time is that worship is so much more than one’s active participation in cultic service and activities, it is so much more than how much one offers sacrifices to God, it is a life dedicated to God reflected in daily matters. The term “worship” for Micah is more a matter of one’s whole life relationship with others in community than the activity or manners in worship service at a designated place or building. In other words, true worship not only celebrates the vertical relationship graciously established by God, but also manifests itself in horizontal relationship by living a life full of love and humility, justice to the poor and needy, charity toward the vulnerable ones.

While cultic service and social life are mutually interrelated and are supposed to go hand in hand, there has been tension between them, the former is extremely emphasized over the latter. As a result, life starts to unravel and the people of God lose their real identity and purpose. Society breaks down, the vulnerable ones who are already on the margins of society are marginalized further, and they begin to be victims of
oppression. The concern of their cultic service and laws becomes a matter of the letter rather than the spirit.\(^1\) Thus, the message of Micah challenges the people of God in his time to re-examine themselves and to turn back from their overly cultic committed lifestyle to walking humbly with their God, that will constitute seeking justice and loving \textit{hesed}. 

The message of Micah and its challenges are still pertinent today, especially for the Chin Christian community in Myanmar. Before going into further implications, I would like to first briefly talk about who the Chin people are and why Micah’s message has to do with them. Because of the scope and limitation of this research, a detailed presentation of the Chin peoples’ history will be avoided except for some necessary information.

**The Land and Its Peoples**

The name Chin represents one of the ethnic groups in Myanmar. Basically, Myanmar with its total population (54 million) as of 2019, is made up of 135 ethnic groups with their diverse and unique cultures. Administratively, the land is divided into seven states representing the seven major ethnic groups—Kachin, Kaya, Kayin, Chin, Mon, Rakhaing, Shan—and seven divisions—Mandalay, Magway, Pegu, Yangon, Ayeyarwady, Tanintharyi, and Sagaing—representing the ethnic Bamar which includes 70% of the country’s population. The Bamar are the majority and they settle in the lowlands which are the central part of the country. All the other tribal groups form part of the minority, and mainly settle in the highlands.

\(^1\) Stephen G. Dempster, Micah, 227-228.
According to the research made by Pum Za Mang, the Chins are estimated to number “over 3 million, and their ancestral homeland is divided into Chin State in western Burma, Mizoram State and part of Manipur State in North-east India and the Chittagong Hills in Bangladesh as a direct result of British colonization.”2 Even within the Chin ethnic group itself, “at least six primary Chin tribal groups can be identified and sub-categorized into 63 sub-tribes, speaking at least 20 mutually unintelligible dialects”3 reported by Human Rights Report in 2009. Surprisingly, despite their diverse tribal groups and dialects the Chin people have no common language so as to communicate with one another, that leaves later generations to use Burmese language in communicating with other tribal groups.

The very first Christian missionaries who arrived in Hakha, the capital of Chin State, were the Rev. Arthur E. Carson and Laura Carson from the United States on March 15, 1899. From that time on, Chin people had seen several missionaries coming back and forth over the years sowing the seeds of the gospel and helping the Chin people in every aspect like education, agriculture, medical, literature and translations. At the time, even though our ancestors did not know the Bible message deeply enough, their lives were characterized by faithfulness, righteousness, forgiveness, justice, love and service to others. They were so enthusiastic in sharing the gospel that everyone became a missionary—at least to their neighbors.4 As a result of God’s blessing on the sacrifices of

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foreign and local missionaries, Chin Christians celebrated Chin Christian Centenary in 1999, and 85.3 percent of the total Chin population have now become Christians. By the late middle of the 20th century, after 40 years of Christianity in the Chin Hills, the Hlimsang Movement, Revival Movement, and Free Evanglist movement etc. became popular among the Chin Christians.5

Basically, the “Hlimsang Movement,” entered in the Chin hill about 1950s, is best translated in English as “high joy” and could be understood as rejoicing in the Spirit. The hlimsang people expressed their joy by dancing, rolling and singing.6 They could even dance, sing and roll non-stop the whole night. People became exhausted physically the next day, and as a result they became half-hearted and idle in their everyday works and duties like planting crops, meeting family and social needs. All they could think of is the time to go back in worship service and rejoice in high spirit again.

On the other hand, the Revival movement also had their own emphasis which is “once saved always saved” that completely neglects ethical duties of Christians. This movement and idea have misled the people in their spiritual journey and some revivalists even claimed that “After I have got the assurance of salvation, I cannot lose it again even if I lie on a woman or if I murder a person.”7 As a result, sexual promiscuity and ethical immorality rapidly increase among church members. In doing so, they willfully neglected the social and ethical responsibility entailed in gospel. This movement had been strongly

5 Ibid., 65.
6 Ibid, 65.
7 Zomi Theological College, Chin Church History (Falam: Zomi Theological College, 2012), 154.
resisted and criticized because of its misunderstanding of the Bible message and misleading of the people. There have been conflicts and divisions among Churches.

The latest movement, whose teaching is still as fresh until today, is called the Free Evangelists movement, said to emerge around 1989. It can also be called a revival movement. As a result of this movement, many people were born again and their lives have been transformed. The evangelist’s priority is to conduct crusades and camping for spiritual awakening. The movement basically perceives any involvement in social service and any biblical interpretation from social perspective as liberal or unspiritual. Most of the teachings focus on the vertical relationship with God, and are very weak in pressing on the horizontal relationship with others. People are taught and encouraged to read the Bible, pray every day, live a holy life by avoiding alcohol, smoking, chewing tobacco or betel nut, reading novels, watching non-Christian movies and even listening to love songs. People are also inspired to be generous in giving the so-called “seed-faith” (this kind of gifts usually goes directly to speakers/preachers according to the givers’ preferences). Probably, this one-sided teaching on living a holy life has caused us to dichotomize secular from sacred as we began to recognize secular things as temporal and spiritual things as eternal.

People’s Misunderstanding of Worship and Its Effects

Even though movements like hlimsang and revivalist have begun to cease in form and practice, they still have a more or less lingering impact among Chin Christian people, especially in this 21st century generation. Until today we see in some churches, if not

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most, the emphasis seems to weigh more on emotional activities in worship services like
dancing, clapping or raising hands and shouting “Hallelujah” and “Amen”! Furthermore,
in trying to make the worship of the church more spiritual, people of new generations
focus more on the style and manner of worship introducing more current and
contemporary ones with a new use of musical instruments. In addition, numerous
speakers and worshipers have sprung up with emphasis on the gifts of the Holy Spirit,
speaking in tongues, healing, signs and miracles etc. considering themselves as more
spiritual than others.

This kind of practice and the poor grasp of the concept of worship have
mushroomed in speed and are now misleading people of a new generation into acting and
behaving as if the God we worship is only present in the church. As a result, many Chin
Christians tend to measure whether others are spiritual or not by their manners and
characters in worship service as if one’s spirituality is a characteristic to be seen only in
the church. It is no wonder that we have more and more church goers wanting to look and
sound spiritual when coming into the church to worship.

This ideology and manner show that we have neglected the biblical idea of true
and acceptable worship that has to do with more than the manners and roles one plays in
church, and that it has to do with the whole spheres of one’s life outside of the church.
Because of this unfortunate concept of “worship” as being confined to the church matters,
God is almost always left behind in the sacred places while we walk out of such arena.
Thus, it is an undeniable in this kind of circumstance that while one aspect of life is
moral, the other aspect of life becomes amoral. We have church-going populations that
have succeeded in dichotomizing our lives.
Christians in character and attitude have become merely like the clothes we set aside for Sunday services and special occasions. Once the service is over and everybody gets home the special clothes that were being put-on and adorned on the body were taken off until the next occasion. Likewise, once we step out of the church when the service is done people who were looking and sounding so “spiritual” become “non-spiritual,” transforming into a drastically different person, as if they were movie professionals acting a dual role. We live as practical atheists in our home, our workplace, and our communities.

This kind of living a dualistic life has drastically affected our societal world in many areas. The very first thing that gets affected is the way we perceive and handle our workplaces. This workplace has largely been considered and treated as part of the non-spiritual places. Thus, Christians handle their work with callousness, dishonesty, with malicious intent and even deceitfully. The very people who appeared to be very spiritual in the church becomes the most cheating and dishonest people in their workplaces. Like in the days of prophets Micah and Amos, the hearts and attitudes of people in their business are full of wicked thought trying to maximize their own profits by cheating customers and employees, people in high positions handle their jobs with thief’s mentality accepting bribery and even chasing after gifts (Mic. 6:10-11, Amos 8:5). Those in higher ranks at work become super bossy around their employees, taking the advantages of being in the superior position, dealing with them harshly and cruelly without mercy and kindness, discriminating and despising their social status. As a result, corruptions, injustice, and dishonesty have prevailed almost everywhere in society. The rich people become richer and the poor people become poorer.
On the other hand, there are people who handle their work with laxity, incompetence and laziness as if the work itself is evil or something. Workplace has gained no respect, no right treatment within the Christendom. As a result, a lot of people get fired from their work leaving them jobless and without any income. Such people have forgotten too soon that the God of the creator of the universe has actively engaged in ‘work’ himself in the first place (Gen.1&2). Furthermore, he is also the God who gave Adam a mandate to work (Gen. 1:28, 2:15) making him the very first human being serving God in the garden of Eden by diligently obeying his command. Therefore, work cannot be considered as evil or treated disrespectfully, and the workplace must also be maintained as sacred. If believers can consider their workplace for what it is, an avenue for worship through service, the glaring issues of corruption, injustice, unprofessionalism and other ills will be curbed.

Another thing that has been affected is the way we handle relationships and family matters. Again, people who sound “spiritual” in worship, who preach about “love” and “kindness” fervently in church’s pulpit have become most atheists and abusive people in their relationship with their spouse and their children. Thus, cases of divorce have also increased within the Christian community. I have heard my senior Pastor preaching about one family that pictures the current case vividly. One Sunday, the husband delivered a sermon on the topic of ‘love’ enthusiastically and encouraged the congregations how powerful this love can change peoples’ lives. Upon the hearing of his preaching, the wife got-up immediately and went home in the middle of the sermon. Before the service was over, the wife came back bringing all their beddings, backpacks, along with her three children. At their surprise, the congregation asked what was it all
about and the wife replied, “my husband seems to be so loving and kind and compassionate here in the church, so I decided that we sleep and live here forever, if not so, you wouldn’t believe how a monster and abusive he turns out once he get home.” The story seems just a joke, but it was a real-life issue and there are some many more similar cases in our society. Many families have been broken with the future of their children blurry.

Another thing that gets affected is the way we handle our tongue in and out of the church. Many church goers have mastered the wearing of Christian attitude, greeting and language in the church. With this tongue we sing praises, we give thanks, we offer our prayers to God. Yet, once we are out from Church our sanctimonious look and words have gone. Our tongues are always ready to shoot lies, to speak deceitful words, to talk maliciously, to spread rumors until we ruin or destroy someone else’s business, relationship, their family affair and even their whole life. Christians in Chin Community have become extremely focused on cultic activities and manners in the Church, especially on the ‘how and what’ in worship, that they become ignorant and way too behind in the realization of the social role worship plays in society, relationships, families and other workplaces in life. There are some many more areas in our lives that are affected and in spiritual jeopardy as a result of this dualistic living.

**Further Implications and Challenges**

No wonder, just like in the days of Micah, people of this generation are experiencing and witnessing Christians who live a life of complexity and have blurred some, if not most, Christians from understanding the Christian faith and life as a single unit. With this dichotomy in the church, our society and family started to break down as
the center does not hold, and eventually, as stated by Eddie Gibbs, “those who have turned to Christianity and churches seeking truth meaning have left empty-handed, and confused by the inability of Christians themselves to implement the principles they profess.”

We have been reminded that “true worship begins in everyday life, and true piety is not demonstrated primarily in impressive ritual, but in walking humbly with God and acting with justice and hesed toward others (Micah 6:6-8).” Churches and individuals need to be awakened to this reality and embrace that true worship not only celebrates the vertical relationship with God, but also manifests itself in horizontal relationship with others; stretching our arms to the economically vulnerable and socially low, and living in harmony and peace in the community. To do so, we must lead a life that lives worshipfully at all times in all places, and there is no room for hypocrisy.

Worship must not be used as a means to remedy or to cover-up our disobedient lives and sinful acts as the people in the time of prophets did. Eddie Gibbs has stated this way, “Worship is not entertainment. It is not an expression of cultural elitism. It is not religious education. It is not emotional self-indulgence. Worship does not produce a quick fix but flows out into the whole of life, and the whole of life is then drawn into worship.” Therefore, we need to come to the realization that the walk from the house to the service, and from the service back to the house is an important factor of the service/worship itself. Furthermore, we need to keep in mind that what is taken back from

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11 Eddi Gibbs, *Church Next*, 156.
worship into everyday life from the service is necessarily part of the act of worship as well.\textsuperscript{12}

Biblical Worship is not limited to a person’s interior world. It is neither about a mere sentiment, nor about offering surplus sacrifices. Rather it has to do with real action, visible sphere of our everyday living. Therefore, Christian worship is to be expressed both in the gathering of the church in worship, and in the going about of business in life, the nurturing of families and relationships, the proper treatment of work and duty, the administration of government, the practical support of the vulnerable, the pursuit of justice and the enhancing of human flourishing.\textsuperscript{13} In doing so, people within the community and even outside of the church will be marveled and blessed by the good works that flourish from their worship lives within and become the exact bearers of what Martin Luther wrote about believers, as reported by Risbridger, “Even their seemingly secular works are a worship of God and obedience well-pleasing to God.”\textsuperscript{14}

It is reasonably true that spending an hour or two on Sunday morning saying words, singing praises and giving numerous kinds of offerings to glorify God is much easier than living the whole life to his glory for seven days each week. Yet, the message of Micah has challenged us to live a life of integrity in which the words we say to God are matched by the lives we lead for God. We must not forget that “the same Spirit whose presence fills us as we gather for worship, empowers us as we go to worship in the whole of life; the same gospel message which we welcome in our corporate worship, is

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{\textsuperscript{12} Stephen G. Dempster, \textit{Micah}, 227.}
\footnote{\textsuperscript{13} John Risbridger, \textit{The Message of Worship} (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 152.}
\footnote{\textsuperscript{14} Ibid, 152.}
\end{footnotes}
sufficient to direct and give meaning to all we do as we go to worship, is sufficient to
direct and give meaning to all we do as we go to worship in our homes, families and
workplaces.”

It is not possible to celebrate the love of God in church, but fail to love his people.
It is not acceptable that we declare his authority and kingship in our lives in the church,
but continue to live in a conscious disobedience to his voice. It is not tolerable that we
bring all surplus offerings and even claim to offer our live to him in the church, but live
our lives as practical atheists in our family, workplace and community. They are all
anathema to God. Thus, Micah message stands as a fresh reminder for today’s churches,
the need to re-examine the way we see and interpret worship in the church. It also stands
as a challenge to rediscover the social role that is entailed in worship, and to balance our
sacred life and secular life for the benefit of ourselves, for others and for community. We
must, therefore, remember that “at the close of a service, the work of worship has only
just begun.”

Conclusion

There is so much that needs to be learned from the purpose of God to the people
of his chosen to become a community of worship. Their worship was not just to be
expressed in tabernacle or temple but in their whole life. It had been made known to them
since the beginning that the world was not to be carved up into sacred and secular spheres
and that people were not to live a dichotomize life, but that all of life and place belong to
God. The God-given law to them taught what would please God in every aspect of their


16 Risbridger, 162.
lives. Worship that starts from the sanctuary or temple is to flow out within the community by conducting a life of integrity, love, justice for the poor and the hopeless.

It is my hope that the hearing of the truth about theological message on Micah’s teaching of the nature and purpose of worship will somehow stimulate the Chin Christian community in Myanmar. This message will stand as a wake-up call for the people from their misunderstanding of worship and their ignorance about the social duties that are entailed in worship. They, then, will be able to move from where they are today to where God wants them to be in relationships, families, workplaces and even what they could do for society.

It has been reminded again and again to the people of Israel how God revealed himself and came down to deliver them who were being oppressed and treated unruly from the power of the Egyptians (Micah 6:4-5). It is always God’s desire that his people reflect his character and actions in their daily lives and their relationship with others. By reflecting his character and action, God’s people are representing God to a wider community and to the whole world. As God’s presence, love and mercy were tangibly demonstrated by delivering his people from Israel’s bondage and leading them to the promise land, so the presence, love, and kindness of the church should be tangible, visible and able to be experienced by the people that are in contact with her on a daily basis, and to a wider community in the same manner.

The community is to be blessed and benefited by the presence of the church. Hence, God’s people are mandated to engage in social works for establishing justice, righteousness, mercy, love and peace in the community because this is the only way the
community can be blessed and benefited. In order to fulfill this mandate, the church should be God’s eyes, ears, mouthpiece, hands and feet in this world moved by God’s steadfast love and unfailing grace.

**Being God’s Eyes:** As the eyes of God, we need to see that all people are created in God’s own image (Gen 1:27) regardless of the differences in gender, age, race, color, rank, merit, work, need, and legal entitlement. Seeing all people as divine image-bearers will definitely transform the way we treat others, especially the poor, needy, outcast and marginalized ones. Moreover, the way we perceive the whole world will be different as well, and accept that all of life belongs to God, “the earth is the Lord’s, and everything in it, the world and all who live in it” (Ps. 24:1). Thereafter, the way we handle people and the way we treat our family, our workplace and society as a whole will be different. Seeing them as God does, and feeling them as His will compel us to see their needs and feel love for them.

**Being God’s Ears:** As the ears of God, the church needs to listen and hear the sound of helpless people crying, and be attentive to meet their needs. The sad thing is that just like in Micah’s days, it is the people who are in higher positions, more powerful, rich and capable are the ones who shut their ears to listen to the sound of people who are crying for help, justice and mercy. And this people are the ones manipulating and jeopardizing the well-being of people of lower position and status for their own gain. They will not go unpunished. The proverbs also say, “He who shuts his ear to the cry of the poor will also cry himself and not be answered” (21:13). Micah’s message calls the believing and
worshiping community to become a listening heart that can hear the cries of the people and community around us.

**Being God's Mouthpiece:** As God’s mouthpiece, the church needs to be the voice of the voiceless people. This is the church’s prophetic role in its society, just as the Old Testament prophets spoke to their society. We are not to be like the false prophets who exercised their functions for their own gain and used their gifts for their personal profit only (3:11). They led God’s people astray (Mic. 3:5) by practicing outward rituals without any inward seriousness of purpose (6:6-7), pretending blindness to the injustice political leaders were doing in order to earn their goodwill and inventing religious justifications for the conduct of political leaders and business men. Being God’s mouthpiece, we need to also be careful of the use of our tongue. It is not to be used for our own profits, for the spread of rumors and lies to hurt and ruin people’s life. It is to be used for the purpose of glorifying God; for the support of others, for the building-up of one another in the community, for the spread of love and care for others.

**Being God’s hand and feet:** As the hands of God, the church needs to be the hands that help the helpless, welcome the unwelcome, embrace the marginalized, clothe the naked, feed the hungry, deliver the oppressed, practice alms giving, etc. These actions are the concrete and tangible demonstrations of God’s love, grace, mercy, compassion, righteousness and justice shown to us and bestowed upon us. As God’s feet, the church needs to stand up for all those people in the community. It is the calling of the church to expand its horizontal scope of worship from within the church to outside of the church by reaching out and standing up for the people in needs.
Authentic worship is characterized by its effect on the worship of our whole lives. When we come together we meet to worship God by glorifying and expressing the thanks and praise to Him and when we leave, we go out to worship him by living our lives to reflect his love in every aspect of our lives with gratitude and praise. When we live a worshipful lifestyle on a daily basis, God will be glorified, indeed, through our undivided devotional life.
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