

Concordia Journal

Volume 39 | Number 4

Article 18

2013

Epiphany 4 • Micah 6:1–8 • February 2, 2014

William Carr Jr.

Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, carrw@csle.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <http://scholar.csle.edu/cj>

 Part of the [Practical Theology Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Carr, William Jr. (2013) "Epiphany 4 • Micah 6:1–8 • February 2, 2014," *Concordia Journal*: Vol. 39: No. 4, Article 18.

Available at: <http://scholar.csle.edu/cj/vol39/iss4/18>

This Homiletical Help is brought to you for free and open access by Scholarly Resources from Concordia Seminary. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Concordia Journal* by an authorized administrator of Scholarly Resources from Concordia Seminary. For more information, please contact seitzw@csle.edu.

Epiphany 4 • Micah 6:1–8 • February 2, 2014

In spring 2013, I taught an elective to our Residential Alternate Route students on the book of Micah. Early in the term, one of the students asked how the Seminary can afford to offer a full ten-week course to the study of just one book, as brief as Micah. I can imagine that most of my exegetical colleagues would relish, as I did, the opportunity to read slowly and repeatedly one biblical book, to digest its message and the way it is told.

At first, Micah 6 seems to echo Micah 1, with calls to hear what the LORD has to say. But there is a pronounced difference. In Micah 1, Yahweh is not prepared to listen to anyone; he is about to act, decisively, even ruthlessly. He is going to make Samaria a heap (1:6), but Judah and Jerusalem are not immune to his judgment (1:10). Among cancer patients and their families, it is not unusual to hear the lament that the treatment is worse than the cure. But if the treatment actually produces a cure—by no means guaranteed—then we might be prepared to say it was worth it. Yahweh is going to bring disaster on his people—not all at once, but it will come, and it is entirely deserved—but gradually it emerges that, through the ordeal, will come deliverance (chs. 4–5).

Micah 6 begins on a similar note: a general call to “hear what the LORD says” (6:1), with no addressee indicated, then a call to the mountains also to hear what ESV calls “the indictment” (Heb. רִיב)—what a fair number of OT commentators call a “lawsuit,” but it isn’t necessarily that technical. Yahweh has a dispute (רִיב) with his people, and he is going to argue with them (6:2b; the preposition in both clauses is עִם, so there is no reason for rendering it “against” the first time and “with” the second, as does ESV).

The pronounced difference comes clear in the LORD’s question. Unlike chapter 1, where there was no question but that the people are guilty, here the LORD puts himself “in the dock”: “What have I done to you? How have I wearied you?” (6:3).

The benchmark of the LORD’s devotion to his people was the exodus (6:4), and yet it was not “enough” for Yahweh to liberate the people of Israel and give them leaders. He remained with them throughout the way of their wandering. He averted disaster in the confrontation with Moab; Balak turned back (Nm 24:25). In his disputation here, Yahweh declines to mention Baal Peor (Nm 25), but invokes his guidance from Shittim to Gilgal—to make a longer story short: Gilgal is Israel’s first stop in the land Yahweh swore to give their forefathers, where Joshua circumcised the people and they celebrated the Passover (Jo 4). The LORD saw them through their entire journey; he brought them to the goal. These three broad segments from the exodus history are “the saving acts” (ESV), in Hebrew צְדָקוֹת “the righteousnesses” of the LORD.

Yahweh’s disputation is a call to remember what he has done. There is an “old” hymn—it didn’t make the cut into LSB—that this call to remember evokes for me: “The Lord Hath Helped Me Hitherto” (TLH 33), or “God Brought Me to This Time and Place” (LW 456). Verse 2 seems particularly apt:

I praise and thank Thee, Lord, my God,
For Thine abundant blessing,

Which heretofore Thou hast bestowed
And I am still possessing.
Inscribe this on my memory:
The Lord hath done great things for me
And graciously hath helped me.
(TLH 33:2)

The remaining verses of the Micah text are a tale of two responses. The first (vv. 6–7) misunderstands the character of Yahweh, who is God on high (אֱלֹהֵי מְרוֹם). God is not impressed by bigger shrines and grandiose campaigns and strategies and gestures. Rather, “what is good” (v. 8) are simple things, which people who know what God has done can carry out: *מִשְׁפָּט* (justice), *חֶסֶד* (chesed; often “loving-kindness” or “mercy,” but pertaining to “devotion” and “loyalty”), and *הִצְנִיעַ* (a hapax legomenon, familiarly translated “walk humbly;” I think it carries a connotation of attentiveness). These are the “stuff” of our ordinary vocations as parents and children, supervisors and workers, governors and citizens: doing what is orderly, with devotion, and circumspectly.

The exodus from Egypt was the paradigm of the LORD’s “righteousnesses” for the people of Micah’s time. We are the beneficiaries of God’s new and, indeed, greater paradigm, Christ. God on high gave his own firstborn for our transgressions, this Jesus who brings the kingdom of God and who begins to teach what it is on a Galilean hillside (the Gospel of the Day, Mt 5:1–12). Whatever else are the “poor in spirit,” the “mourners,” the “meek,” etc., they are people who remember and believe and “do justice, love devotion, and are attentive to God.”

Oh, help me ever, God of grace,
Through ev’ry time and season,
At ev’ry turn, in ev’ry place—
Redemptive love the reason.
Through joy and pain and final breath
By Jesus’ life and saving death
Help me as you have helped me.
(LW 456:3)

William Carr