

## DOES GOD **REALLY** ASK HIS PEOPLE **TO COMPLAIN** AGAINST HIM?

No introduction today. Instead, I'm going to give you some **background** to the book of Micah.

--The year is 735 B.C. The nation of Israel has been divided for roughly 200 years.

--The **northern** kingdom—consisting of 10 of the 12 tribes—was usually called Israel.

--The **southern** kingdom—consisting of Benjamin and Judah—was called Judah, the house of David, or Jerusalem. Although Micah lived in the **southern** kingdom, his words—God's words—were directed **to both** the northern and southern kingdom. He was a contemporary with the prophets Hosea, Amos, Jonah, and Isaiah. The spiritual state of both kingdoms was characterized by idolatry. God, through the prophets, was warning them that judgment was coming. Judgment did come on the northern kingdom just 13 years later!

With that as a brief background, let's turn to Micah 6. Please follow along as I read verses 1-8. I was initially going to preach on just vs 8—especially the phrase “walk humbly with thy God”—but there is too much in the verses leading up to vs 8 to just skip them. I was especially struck by verse 3: “O my people, what have I done unto thee? and wherein have I wearied thee? testify against me.”

This, verse of course, is where I got the title of the message from: “Does God **Really** Ask His People to **Complain** Against Him?” That question—and others—is what we will be looking at this morning.

Notice again vs 1-2 “Hear ye now what the Lord saith; **Arise, contend** thou before the mountains, and let the hills **hear thy voice**.<sup>2</sup> Hear ye, O mountains, the Lord's controversy, and ye strong foundations of the earth: for the Lord hath a controversy with His people, and He will plead with Israel.”

### **1. An invitation from God to His people**

Most commentators suggest that the picture here is that of a courtroom. God is about to bring judgment upon His people and invites them to **present their case** as to why He should **not** judge them.

The “plead” in the last part of vs 2 does not mean that God is “begging” them. Instead, it carries the idea of “reasoning together” like in Isaiah 1:18 “Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord...” It conveys the idea of arguing back and forth. God will provide His reasons for judging them; they will argue as to why He shouldn't.

Who are the **witnesses** going to be? In vs 1, we see the witnesses are the “mountains” and “hills” In vs 2, they are the “mountains” and “strong foundations of the earth”

**Why** would God use hills and mountains—something that can't hear...or speak...or think—as witnesses? **What good** would they do in court? They **couldn't provide** any kind of testimony—and they **couldn't assist** in coming to any kind of verdict!

**Not told why** God calls them to be witnesses, but one possible reason is that the mountains and hills have “observed” Israel's history from the beginning. They have witnessed **God's goodness** to His people as He led them through the Red Sea and the wilderness. They have also **witnessed the evil** that God's people had done against God—like worship idols on the top of those very hills!

### Next let's consider... **2. An indictment from God against His people**

**What** is an indictment? Here's an on-line definition: “An **indictment** is a formal accusation, based upon available evidence, that a person has committed a serious crime.” Twice in vs 2 we see that God has a “controversy” with His people. So what was the controversy?

#### A. The crimes of the people

Although God does not give a detailed list here in **this** passage, He does refer to them throughout the book.

--Mic 1:7 refers to graven images and idols

--In Mic 2:2, we see God's people stealing fields and houses from one another

--In Mic 3:2, we see the leaders of God's people **hating the good**—and **loving the evil**. Sound familiar?

--In Mic 3:11, we see that the judges, priests, and prophets loved money  
--In Mic 6:11, we see they used wicked balances and deceitful weights  
--In Mic 6:12, the rich men are full of violence—and the inhabitants of the land are liars  
--In Mic 7:6, the son dishonoureth the father, the daughter riseth against her mother...

Please know that this is not all of their sins, but these are the ones I noticed with just a quick skimming through of the book. No wonder God had a controversy with them!

In spite of their sin, we see... B. The condescension of God

I'm not using "condescension" in the normal way we think of the word. When we hear the word *condescending*, we often think of someone who acts in **an arrogant or patronizing** manner—like believing you're doing someone a favor by "lowering yourself" to be with them or talk to them!

The older definition doesn't have the "holier than thou," superiority attitude connected to it, though. Instead, it means to **voluntarily descend** from a higher rank to **a lower one** in order to commune with those who are inferior to you. God is **far superior** to us—and does have to literally lower Himself to talk to us!

David understood this truth as seen in **Psalm 8:3-4** "When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; <sup>4</sup>What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?"

**Psalm 113:5-6** carries the same thought: "Who is like unto the Lord our God, **who dwelleth on high**, <sup>6</sup>**Who humbleth Himself to behold** the things that are in heaven, and in the earth!"

We see God's condescension here in vs 3 "O my people, what have I done unto thee? And wherein have I wearied thee? testify against me." What a powerful, heart-searching verse! Let's think through it a little bit.

#### **i. Condescension of God seen in what He calls them**

"O my people," God says to them. He says it here—and He says it again in vs 5. Note the compassion and tenderness of God in these words. Please don't take this the wrong way, but it is almost as if God stops being the prosecutor in the courtroom—and is now the Father sitting **next to them on the couch!**

Some of us have done that **as parents**—or have had that experience **as a child—or both**. We did wrong—and deserved to be reprimanded and punished—and our Mom or Dad pulls us aside in tenderness to reason with us. That is the picture I believe we are seeing here.

God is reminding them that He **chose them** to be His—and that they are **still His!** And just as we **do not disown our children** when they sin against us, God **did not disown them** when they sinned against Him!

In vs 3, God does not just call them His people. Notice the rest of the verse.

Here we have the... **ii. Condescension of God seen in how He challenges them**

What does God **challenge** them to do? He calls on them to **complain** about Him...to tell Him how He has **failed** them...to bring a list of **their grievances** regarding God's shortcomings! What an amazing thought!

And yet it is not the only time God asked His people to try to **find fault** with Him! God issued a similar challenge to His people through the prophet Jeremiah.

**Jeremiah 2:5** "Thus saith the Lord, **What iniquity have your fathers found in me**, that they are gone far from me, and have walked after vanity, and are become vain?"

--God—the Perfect, sinless One—asking **sinner**s to show Him His sin!

--God—the All-knowing One & source of Wisdom—asking **the unwise** to show Him where He failed to be wise!

--God—the One whose name is Truth and the One for whom it is impossible to lie—asks **liars** to show Him where He has failed to tell the truth!

--God—the Always Faithful One—asking **unfaithful** ones to show Him where He has been unfaithful to them!

--And God—the loving One who abundantly pardons—asking His **unloving, ungrateful** people to show Him when He stopped loving them!

That, my friends, is hard to fathom, isn't it? And yet—that is what God is challenging His people to do! They won't find any failures, of course, and to reinforce the **impossibility** of them finding any, we see next...

### C. The care of God for them

Vs 4 “For I brought thee up out of the land of Egypt, and redeemed thee out of the house of servants...”

--God reminds them that they were slaves in Egypt—and that their lives were incredibly difficult.

We’re not going to turn there, but Exodus 1 describes their hardships.

--They were afflicted with burdens (1:11, 12) and their lives were “bitter with hard bondage” (vs 14)

--Twice it says they served with rigour—which comes from a word that means “to break in pieces, to crush.” In other words, they were treated cruelly with harsh words—and with beatings!

--On top of that, their newborn baby boys were being put to death by the Egyptians shortly after birth!

God reminds them that He **rescued them** from that. He brought plague after plague upon Pharaoh and the Egyptians—but none of those 10 plagues touched so much as one of God’s people!

God not only **cared** for them, He also **provided leaders** for them. We see that in the second half of Vs 4 “...and I sent before thee Moses, Aaron, and Miriam.”

--Moses was the leader of the nation—and the one who taught them the Law

--Aaron was the priest who offered sacrifices on their behalf

--Miriam was the sister of Moses and Aaron—and the one who led in the praise of God after God parted the Red Sea for His people, then destroyed Pharaoh and the Egyptian army in the same sea!

In vs 5, God reminds them that Balak, the king of Moab, had hired the prophet Balaam to curse God’s people. God would not let that happen, though, and turned the curses into blessings! You can read more about that in Numbers 22-24.

Before we move on, I want to go back again to vs 3. At the time God used Micah to write these words, many of God’s people were not following God. Instead—as already mentioned—they were worshipping idols.

**Idol worship** is not necessarily bowing down to a statue, though, is it? Idol worship is worshipping **something (or someone)** other than God.

So even though these words were directed to God’s people the Jews in 735 B.C., God wants us to consider whether or not **we as God’s people** are doing the same thing. I believe God would have us consider vs 3 as...

### D. A challenge from God to us

God’s people—those who have become children of God by trusting Jesus as the payment for their sins and have been born again—**sometimes wander** from Him. We can get cold...and lose our first love. Jesus put it like this in the parable of the sower: **Mark 4:19** “And the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things entering in, **choke the word, and it becometh unfruitful.**”

The word—God’s Word—**was once fruitful** in our lives, but it has now **become unfruitful**. Why? Because other things have crept in: “the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things.” Is that you today? God knows—and so do you! If it is you, listen to what God is saying.

First, God says to you: “O my child...” What compassion and tenderness God has for His children—even the prodigals! God then asks, “...what have I done unto thee?”

‘Where have I **failed you**; where did I **let you down**; when **did I not do** what I said I would do?’

God then asks, “...wherein have I wearied thee?” ‘What yoke have I put upon you that is so heavy? What burden have I given you that is unreasonable?’ What would you answer God if He asked you those questions?

And let’s not forget—God did **more for us** than bring us out of the slavery of Egypt! He redeemed us—He rescued us—**from hell** by paying the penalty we deserve so that we won’t have to pay it!

Lastly, let’s consider the response of God’s people. What did God’s people have to say for themselves? What defense did they offer up **as to why they had forsaken** the living God and followed idols?

**They don’t!** They don’t offer complaints against God—and they don’t try to defend themselves! Instead, we see... **3. An inquiry by the people**

Their response to God is in the form of questions: two in vs 6 and two in verse 7.

What is interesting about the questions is that they **lead to more questions**—especially about the **attitude behind** the questions! Here’s what I mean.

A. Are they displaying desire—or disobedience?

At first glance, it seems the people are demonstrating a willingness **to do whatever it takes** to be forgiven!

Vs 6. How shall I come before the high God, the God of heaven? Shall I come before God with the burnt offerings, with calves of a year old? Vs 7. Or will you be pleased with “thousands of rams” or “ten thousands of rivers of oil?” Or, do you want me to sacrifice my firstborn for the sin of my soul?

They go from an **expected** offering (a calf) ...to an **excessive** offering (thousands of rams and rivers of oil) ...to an **offensive** offering—the sacrifice of a child!

Their underlying attitude—this is my opinion—is **not that they are willing** to do anything, but that they are **pretending** not to know how to approach God—even though they do know! Their supposed **intense desire** is really a **demonstration of their unwillingness** to do what they know God wants. In other words, they were being **disobedient!**

Along the same lines, B. Are they showing sincerity—or indicating insincerity?

Are they **being sincere** when they ask God if He will be pleased with “thousands of rams” or “ten thousands of rivers of oil?” Can they realistically offer those things?

Are they **being sincere** when they say they are willing to offer their firstborn—especially in light of the fact that God has already told them that He despises that practice and told them not to do it!

It is almost as if they are **sarcastically** saying, ‘Is there anything that will satisfy you, God?’

C. Are they elevating the external over the internal?

This, I believe, is the crux of the matter. They are all about doing...giving...offering...sacrificing. They are willing—it seems—to give anything and everything—except **themselves!**

Not only that but notice the **tense of the verb** in vs 8. “He **hath shewed** [past tense] thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee...”

God is **not showing them now**—at this moment—what is good and what is required; they had been shown it before! In other words, they **knew how** to come before God.

--They already knew how to worship God!

--God had already told them what was good.

--They already knew what pleased God.

--They already knew what was required of them.

How did they know? Notice on your outline Deuteronomy 10:12...

**Deut 10:12** “And now, Israel, what doth the Lord thy God require of thee, but to **fear** the Lord thy God, to **walk in all His ways**, and to **love Him**, and to **serve** the Lord thy God **with all thy heart and with all thy soul,**”

What did God want from them?

--Fear—meaning awe, reverence, and respect

--Walk in all His ways—meaning obedience

--Love Him—be devoted to Him more than any thing or any person

--Serve Him with all our heart and soul—not serve Him with the left overs of our energy, talents, and time

They also knew what God desired based on what David had written 250 years earlier. Please turn to Psalm 51. Notice vss 16-17 “For thou **desirest not sacrifice**; else would I give it: thou delightest not in burnt offering.

<sup>17</sup> **The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit:** a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.”

God wants a **broken spirit**; God wants a broken and a contrite heart. They knew that—but didn’t want to give God that. They didn’t want to give God their affection and devotion. They didn’t want to give God their lives...and love...and loyalty.

**Are we** any different? We aren’t, are we?

--We—like them—want to offer things to God—yet **hang onto our sin!**

--We—like them—want to offer things to God—but **not ourselves!**

--And we—like them—focus on the external, instead of **our hearts!**

So what does God want us to do with what we've heard this morning?

1. Vs 3 starts with, "O my people..."

What does God call you? Are you God's child? God is the Father of some people—but not everyone! In fact, Jesus called some religious people children of the devil!

Everyone of us—right now—is either a child of God or a child of the devil! There is no in between.

Again I ask, which are you? If you don't have Christ as your Savior, you are not a child of God!

2. Second, God wants each of us to answer these questions:

"what have I done unto thee?            wherein have I wearied thee?"

Probing questions, aren't they?

--Has God failed you?            No; He hasn't!

--Have you failed God?            Yes; you have!

Humble yourself then and give Him yourself! That's what He wants—and that's what He deserves!