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## On Doing Justice, Loving Mercy, and Walking Humbly in Micah 6:8: The Peaceable Ways of Israel's God, Then and Now

Paul N. Anderson

George Fox University, panderso@georgefox.edu

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## ÄGYPTEN UND ALTES TESTAMENT 117



### A Sage in New Haven

Essays on the Prophets,  
the Writings, and  
the Ancient World  
in Honor of Robert R. Wilson

Edited by Alison Acker Gruseke  
and Carolyn J. Sharp

Zaphon

Illustration on the cover: Orthostat, Bit-Hilani IV, Zinjirli (Sam'al), 8<sup>th</sup> c. BCE.  
Musicians playing frame drums at a banquet of King Bar-Rakib.  
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in Honor of Robert R. Wilson

Edited by Alison Acker Gruseke and Carolyn J. Sharp

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## On Doing Justice, Loving Mercy, and Walking Humbly in Micah 6:8

The Peaceable Ways of Israel's God, Then and Now

Paul N. Anderson

Despite YHWH's presentation in the Hebrew Scripture as, at times, a warrior,<sup>1</sup> a divine portrait also emerges of a God of justice, mercy, and lovingkindness, rooted in God's steadfast love (*hesed*)<sup>2</sup> and desire for peaceable wholeness (*šālôm*).<sup>3</sup> Especially within the prophetic tradition faithfulness to God's loving and merciful ways is exhorted, calling for repentance and renewal. The prophets call for adherence to God's commandments in practical terms, seeing obedience as the key to prosperity and divine blessing. Centuries later, John the Baptist and Jesus also see themselves as furthering the social concerns of the Hebrew prophets, which accounts, in part, for their widespread reception—both positive and negative. And, central to the prophets' thrust is the appeal to all humanity to embrace the ways of Israel's God—as declared emblematically in Micah 6:8:

He has told you, O mortal, what is good;  
and what does the LORD require of you  
but to do justice, and to love kindness,  
and to walk humbly with your God?<sup>4</sup>

On one hand, this verse represents the concluding demands of God's court case against the nation in Micah 6, pulling together a number of themes sounded earlier. On the other, it represents the overall ethos of what is expected within God's covenant with Israel. These three values—justice (*mišpāt*), kindness (*hesed*), and walking humbly with God (*ḥṣnē' leket 'im- 'ēlōhekā*)—epitomize the spirit of the prophetic traditions and summarize the ethical thrust of Mosaic law. According to Talmudic interpreters, this didactic saying is one of the most influential and oft-quoted in the prophetic literature, even regarded as a possible compendium of all the *mišwōt*. “R. Simlai when preaching said: Six hundred and thirteen precepts were communicated to Moses, three hundred and sixty negative precepts ... Micah came and reduced them to three.”<sup>5</sup>

Therefore, an overview of the larger ethical thrust of Micah and the eighth-century prophets—Hosea, Amos, and to some degree, Isaiah—serves well an understanding of their shared contexts and content. As Robert Wilson argues, the Ephraimite prophets demonstrate distinctive creativity and appear to have influenced the development of Micah's Judean tradition, as well.<sup>6</sup> It is thus useful to examine their shared ideas, reviewing the contexts and content of Micah 6:8. In so doing, this essay will explore the justice of Israel's God, peace and prosperity as components of God's shalomic blessing, the turbulence of Israel's eighth-century situation, and the prophets' creative calls for repentance—highlighting God's peaceable ways—relevant both then and now.

### I. The Just and Righteous Ways of Israel's God

Central to Israel's vocation is its faith-based covenant with God—keeping God's commandments and thus being rewarded by God's blessings. In Genesis 18:18–19, even the LORD's choosing of Abraham

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<sup>1</sup> Bergant, “Yahweh, a Warrior God?”; Cross, “Divine Warrior”; Lind, *Yahweh is a Warrior*. On holy war as a failed panacea in retrospect, cf. Anderson, “Genocide or Jesus?”.

<sup>2</sup> Sakenfeld, *Meaning of Hesed*, 1–21.

<sup>3</sup> Macy, *Shalom of God*.

<sup>4</sup> Biblical translations are from the NRSV, unless otherwise noted.

<sup>5</sup> Ben Zvi, “Twelve Minor Prophets,” 1215, citing Makkot 23b–24a; Sukkah 49b and Radak on Mic 6:8.

<sup>6</sup> Wilson, *Prophecy and Society*, 136–252; see also Wilson's treatment of Micah as a Judean prophet and the intermixing of Northern and Judean traditions, 274–276, 305–306.

is dedicated to furthering righteousness (*ṣādāqā*) and justice (*mišpāṭ*) as a blessing to the entire world.<sup>7</sup> This is because God is holy (*qādōš*), and God's people are called to reflect that character (Deut 32:4; Lev 11:44–45). At the heart of the Decalogue is Israel's call to be a holy nation—a nation of priests (Exod 19:6; cf. 1 Peter 2:9)—and a blessing to the nations (Gen 12:1–3). Central to righteous living, of course, is faith. Abraham's believing God is what was credited to him as righteous (Gen 15:6; cf. Gal 3:6; Ja 2:23), and such is also key to God's blessing the faithful with prosperity and salvation (Isa 45:8; 56:1). Indeed, the just shall live by faith *and* faithfulness (Hab 2:4; cf. Rom 1:17). Within God's relationship with Israel, as God's beloved people keep the covenant and abide in God's ways, God will protect and cause them to prosper. Glorified by justice and righteousness, the LORD responds angrily when Israel ignores God's instruction (Isa 5–25). Thus, covenant faithfulness ensures peace and prosperity, but breaking faith with the ways of God removes divine protection, invites correction, or both.

In many instances throughout Israel's history, these values are extolled and represented in narrative form. During his reign, David is said to administer justice and equity among his people (2 Sam 8:15) and later feels rewarded by the LORD for his righteousness (22:21–25). The Queen of Sheba brings gifts to Solomon and declares that the LORD has appointed him to execute justice and righteousness (1 Kgs 10:9; 1 Chr 9:8). These values are extolled within Israel's psalter (Ps 37:27; 89:14; 97:2; 106:3), in which justice and righteousness are the foundations of the loving ways of YHWH over the entire earth (Ps 33:4–5).

In their embrace, righteousness and justice are borne out in the society's treatment of the vulnerable with mercy and grace. God's house will be a house of prayer for all nations, including foreigners, eunuchs, and the outcasts of Israel (Isa 56:1–8; cf. Mark 11:17). People must not oppress the alien, nor should they abuse the widow or the orphan (Exod 22:21–22; Deut 27:19; Isa 1:17; cf. James 1:27). Rather, these and other vulnerable persons should be cared for at harvest and other times. The Israelites were once slaves in Egypt (Deut 24:18–22), and God is their father and protector (Ps 68:5–6). However, if Israel's leaders become rebels and thieves, loving bribes and gifts while failing to protect the weak, YHWH's anger will turn against them (Isa 1:21–31). Nonetheless, if they put righteousness, justice, and love into practice, they will enjoy the blessings of peace, calm, and security (Isa 32:16–20).

Therefore, if Israel will only embrace God's statutes and live into God's just and righteous ways, blessing will follow (Lev 26:3–13), a gift to those both far and near (Isa 57:18–19). When Israel loosens the bonds of injustice, sets the oppressed free, shares bread with the hungry, welcomes the homeless into their houses, and clothes the naked, then they will prosper. When Israel calls, the LORD will answer with healing presence, and when Israel embraces YHWH's just and righteous ways, healing and peace will abound, and their light will break forth as God's shalomic blessing for the world (Isa 58:6–14).

## II. Peace and Prosperity—God's Shalomic Blessing

Among the central themes of Hebrew Scripture is peace, but God's shalom is not limited to the mere absence of violence, conflict, or warfare. Indeed, those meanings are present, but shalom includes the restoration of relationships, wellbeing, health, and prosperity. It involves living in harmony with nature and humanity as a result of restored relationship with God. On one hand, shalom is presented as a gift from God—a promise to be embraced as a covenant of peace—and yet it also describes the ways in which God works, to be emulated by the faithful. As Howard Macy points out, God's shalom encompasses a larger range of meanings than the English word “peace” conveys: it includes a comprehensive understanding of personal and interpersonal wellbeing.<sup>8</sup>

It is the larger range of meaning in the word *shalom* that makes it particularly significant. In its various uses *shalom* means completion, fulfillment, well-being, wholeness or making whole, setting things right. What is broken is mended. What is distorted or out of balance is restored to its proper shape or proportion. To do something with a whole heart is to do it with a heart, *shalem*,

<sup>7</sup> Swartley, “Relation of Justice/Righteousness,” 29–33.

<sup>8</sup> Macy, *Shalom of God*, 4 (italics original).



using an adjective formed from this root. In poetry, *shalom* is used as a synonym of the word for healing. Jeremiah says, “We were hoping for peace ... for a time of healing” (Jeremiah 8:15). I often think of a circle when I think of shalom, a circle that draws people in rather than shutting them out.

God’s covenants with Israel are often presented as being rooted in peace. In Isaiah 54, consolation is extended to barren Israel and those who have suffered the hardship of exile and desolation. The Holy One will be Israel’s redeemer and will gather them in compassion (vv. 5–8). Here the LORD’s steadfast love is remembered as a gift of grace, celebrated from one generation to another (Exod 15:3; 20:6; Deut 5:10; 1 Chr 16:34; Ps 136:1–3). As in the days of Noah, when the LORD promised never again to destroy humanity, that promise continues as a covenant of peace and compassion (Isa 54:9–10).

Within that covenant, prosperity and peace prevail as people learn YHWH’s ways (v. 13, cited also by Jesus in John 6:45): “All your children shall be taught by the LORD, and great shall be the prosperity of your children.” Peace is equated with justice, although some do not know the way of peace (Isa 59:8). Nonetheless, YHWH will finally appoint peace as their overseer and righteousness as their taskmaster as a vision of the peaceable kingdom (60:17). The promise of an everlasting covenant of peace continues in Ezekiel, where wild animals will be banished from the land (34:25), and Israel will dwell in the land given to Jacob and ruled by a Davidic king (37:25–27). Within that covenant, several elements are sounded.

#### *On vines and fig trees*

First, within this broad vision of peace, prosperity and flourishing are emblemized in Micah’s description of each one *living under their vine and fig tree*.<sup>9</sup> The post-exilic Zechariah 8:12 then lays out the results of sowing peace: “the vine shall yield its fruit, the ground shall give its produce, and the skies shall give their dew.” Speaking truth to one another and rendering authentic judgments make peace (v. 16). The removal of the chariot from Ephraim and the war-horse from Jerusalem results from God’s commanding peace over the nations and God’s dominion from sea to sea (9:10). Within the prophets’ expansions upon prosperity and adversity as resulting from Israel’s covenant faithfulness, the graphic imagery of sitting under one’s own vine and fig tree appears as both promise and threat. If people follow God’s ways, peace and prosperity will abound; if not, their vines and fig trees will be removed.

#### *Devastation looms*

Second, devastation is forewarned if the people do not repent. If Gomer does not forsake her false lovers and return to her true husband, YHWH will lay waste her vine and fig trees (Hos 2:14). Devastation comes from armies or natural agents such as locusts, blight, and mildew (Amos 4:9; Joel 1:7, 12), and God’s judgment extends to the nations. In disgust over the Assyrian onslaught, Isaiah warns, “All their host shall wither like a leaf withering on a vine, or fruit withering on a fig tree” (Isa 34:4). And, with Babylon’s advance later in sight, Jeremiah warns of vine-and-fig-tree devastation if God’s people do not repent (Jer 5:17; 8:13).

#### *A return to flourishing*

Third, a return to the ways of Israel’s God promises a restoration of peace and prosperity, restoring the hope, as Micah suggests, that God’s people “shall all sit under their own vines and under their own fig trees, and no one shall make them afraid” (Micah 4:4). Joel holds out hope that God will remove the northern army and restore the land. Thus, even the animals of the field can be hopeful because the wilderness pastures will be green, trees will bear fruit, and the fig tree and vine will bring forth their full yield (Joel 2:18–27). In rebuilding the temple after the Babylonian exile, God promises to Joshua the priest that the LORD of hosts will “remove the guilt of this land in a single day,” allowing God’s people to “invite each other to come under your vine and fig tree” (Zech 3:9–10). Reflecting upon and anticipating such perspectives, Micah outlines the ways of Israel’s God: calling for repentance and ad-

<sup>9</sup> Brueggemann, “‘Vine and Fig Tree,’” 189–194.

herence to these values in order that peace and prosperity might be insured (Micah 4:1–4).

While peace and prosperity are seen as the reward of faithfulness, faith-filled spiritual maturity is also sounded by both Habakkuk and Haggai, who exult in the God of salvation, even if the fig tree fails to blossom and the vines are fruitless (Hab 3:17–18; Hag 2:18–19). It is with this overall set of convictions that the eighth-century prophets sounded their alarms, calling God's people to repentance in order to stave off disaster, while hoping for peace and prosperity.<sup>10</sup>

### III. The Turbulent Times of Israel's Eighth-Century Prophets

Following the division of Israel's monarchy (ca. 930 BCE), both the Southern and Northern Kingdoms faced greater vulnerability as the Neo-Assyrian empire expanded westward.<sup>11</sup> In the perspective of eighth-century prophets, the "Golden Age" of Israel might be past, but the recovery of peace and prosperity hinged upon repentance and trusting in YHWH. Thus, harkening back to the days of Solomon, "Judah and Israel lived in safety, from Dan even to Beer-sheba, all of them under their vines and fig trees" (1 Kgs 4:25). However, the North-South tensions that had divided the kingdom continued into the eighth century, as Israel's king Pekah (737–732 BCE) allied with Reza, king of Aram, in attacking Jerusalem. In response, Judah's king Ahaz (732–716 BCE) drew support from Tiglath Pileser III of Assyria.

With the onslaughts of several Assyrian invasions in full view, the prophets Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, and Micah responded to the expansions of Tiglath Pileser III (745–727 BCE) and his followers—especially Shalmaneser V (727–722 BCE) and Sargon II (722–705 BCE)—calling for repentance in hopes that God might yet step in to protect Israel. They rebuked trusting in chariots or Egypt, and such failures of faith actually provoked the most devastating of Sennacherib's (705–681 BCE) incursions into Judah: as the Assyrians continued to demand tribute, Israel became vulnerable to Egypt's seduction—protection, if Israel would serve as a frontal hedge. With the death of Sargon II and Sennacherib newly on Assyria's throne, Hezekiah felt emboldened to resist, which was viewed by Sennacherib as a challenge. Therefore, the warnings of the prophets were not simply religious but steeped in pragmatic political insight.

Part of Assyria's strategy after invading a region involved dispersing populations—marching Jewish captives to Mesopotamia—and repopulating the area with foreigners. Especially poignant after the conquest and dispersion of Samaria, following the invasions of Shalmaneser and Sargon (2 Kgs 18:9–12) was the decimation of Judah by Sennacherib. According to the Sennacherib Prisms, it is claimed that 46 cities and many small towns in Judah were overrun by the Assyrians, and that over two hundred thousand Jewish captives were deported and resettled in Assyria (cf. also 2 Kgs 18–19; 2 Chr 32; and Isa 36–37).<sup>12</sup>

After conquering Lachish, Sennacherib laid siege to Jerusalem. Sennacherib reports having the Judean king and his subjects locked up as "a bird in a cage."<sup>13</sup> In Israelite perspective, YHWH's power had the last word. Sennacherib tempted Jerusalem's inhabitants with vine-and-fig-tree rhetoric, if Hezekiah would simply give in. Sennacherib scorned trust in YHWH's deliverance, as the gods of other nations had not protected them (Isa 36:14–20).<sup>14</sup> With the people in Jerusalem devastated, Isaiah comforts Hezekiah with an oracle: Sennacherib will hear a rumor, return to his own land, and fall (Isa 37:6–20), thus turning the tables on Assyria's king. Now a hook will pierce *his* nose, and a bit be placed in *his* mouth, as he returns whence he came (Isa 37:22–29).

Isaiah's response was decisive. Because Sennacherib had transgressed the just-righteous-loving-peaceable ways of YHWH, the LORD would have the last word and the arrogant king come to ruin. The promise to Jerusalem echoes Micah's imagery: Jerusalem would "sow, reap, plant vineyards, and eat their fruit," and the "remnant of the house of Judah shall again take root downward, and bear fruit

<sup>10</sup> Lindblom, *Prophecy in Ancient Israel*, 311–375.

<sup>11</sup> Provan, et al., *A Biblical History of Israel*, 343–378; Smith-Christopher, *Micah*, 2–14.

<sup>12</sup> Luckenbill, *The Annals of Sennacherib*, 9–19.

<sup>13</sup> Luckenbill, *The Annals of Sennacherib*, 11.

<sup>14</sup> The reports of Isaiah 36 and 37 are echoed in 2 Kings 18–19.

upward” as a band of survivors (Isa 37:30–32). Regarding Sennacherib, an angel of the LORD descends on the Assyrian encampment, smites a hundred and eighty-five thousand and causes Assyria to return to its homeland (Isa 37:33–38). God thus protected the faithful, bringing victory and relief without military means.

God’s plan to bless the nations through the families of Abraham would not be thwarted, despite the most devastating of setbacks. Central was the invitation to embrace the ways of God as a witness to the world. Therefore, the prophets called for repentance and faithfulness to the ways of Israel’s God, in order that God might restore their peaceable existence.

#### IV. On Calling for Repentance—The Creative Ploys of the Prophets

In calling for repentance and the restoration of covenant faithfulness, Micah and the eighth-century prophets resorted to a number of creative ploys as a means of catching their audiences’ attention. Amos lodges escalating complaints about the surrounding nations—for three sins, and yet four—(Amos 1:3–2:16). One can imagine the applause of his Hebrew compatriots as he warns of God’s disciplining the sins and injustices of other nations—until the final grievances are lodged most expansively against Israel, itself (2:6–16).<sup>15</sup> While eight nations are singled out within these twenty-nine verses, over a third (eleven) are declared against Israel itself:

- They sell the righteous for silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals
- They trample the heads of the poor into the dust and push aside the afflicted
- Father and son go in to the same girl and lay themselves down beside every altar on garments taken in pledge
- In the house of their God, they drink wine bought with fines they imposed
- They made the Nazirites drink wine and commanded the prophets not to prophesy

Because they alone have been chosen, they will be held all the more accountable for their sins (3:2). Privilege implies responsibility.<sup>16</sup> To those who oppress the poor, the LORD announces their removal “with hooks, even the last of you with fishhooks” (4:2), alluding to the Assyrian invasion and exile. Parallel to the ways of Israel’s God declared in Micah 6:8, Amos 5:24 declares: “But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.”

As a dramatic representation of Israel’s unfaithfulness to her husband-redeemer (Isa 54:5), Hosea is commanded to marry Gomer, a prostitute (Hos 1:2).<sup>17</sup> “Go, take for yourself a wife of whoredom and have children of whoredom, for the land commits great whoredom by forsaking the LORD.” Within this enacted parable, parallels to Israel’s relationship with YHWH abound. Whereas YHWH has provided for Israel, she has taken his gifts and pursued other lovers, thinking they will provide for her, when they cannot. Though YHWH could rightly divorce her, he cannot. In a pivotal about-face, YHWH—because of his pathos-filled, steadfast love—will nonetheless allure her, drawing her into a honeymoon wilderness existence, speaking kindly (2:14–15), and even giving her a second dowry to begin their loving covenant anew (3:2). YHWH is Israel’s salvation, not Assyria or the idols of the land (14:1–9).

Another rhetorical device employed by Hosea is the naming of children in symbolic ways. Gomer’s children are named “Jezreel” (the LORD will punish the house of Jehu, Hos 1:4); “Lo-ruhamah” (“not pitied,” v. 6); and “Lo-ammi” (“not my people”). With the restoration of the covenant with Gomer, however, the LORD promises to restore the prosperity of Jezreel, to pity his people, and to re-adopt his

<sup>15</sup> In many ways, Amos sets the trajectory for the provocative ministries of the eighth-century prophets; cf. Wilson, “Early Israelite Prophecy,” 3–8; *Prophecy and Society*, 266–268.

<sup>16</sup> With Heschel, *Prophets*, 1:32, despite being chosen by God, “the prophets felt that to many of their contemporaries this cornerstone was a stumbling block; this refuge, an escape. They had to remind the people that chosenness must not be mistaken as divine favoritism or immunity from chastisement, but, on the contrary, that it meant being more seriously exposed to divine judgment and chastisement.”

<sup>17</sup> Heschel (*Prophets*, 1:52 n. 8) debates the association with this term, seeing it as possibly referencing a disposition rather than an actuated history.

previously disowned children (2:21–23).

Written from a similar perspective as Isaiah's, Micah's ministry addressed both Israel and Judah,<sup>18</sup> redactional layers in the book of Micah reflecting also some later perspectives.<sup>19</sup> Ministering during the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah of Judah (Mic 1:1; 742–696 CE), Micah's opening rhetorical device involves the connecting of regional names—as plays on words—with aspects of destruction, or challenges of false security, connected to each of the place names (vv. 10–15).<sup>20</sup>

A second literary device constructed by Micah is that of a court case against a nation in chapter 6.<sup>21</sup> First, the setting is established, with the LORD as prosecuting attorney, inviting Israel to plead its case before the jury—mountains, hills, and foundations of the earth (vv. 1–2). Second, the LORD reminds Israel of the LORD's gracious acts—delivering them from Egyptian slavery and into Canaan (vv. 3–5). Third, Israel's response is portrayed with satire: YHWH is not impressed by burnt offerings of calves, rams, or rivers of oil; even despicable child sacrifice (vv. 6–7). Fourth, the LORD requires Israel “to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God” (v. 8). Fifth, Israel's sentence is then set forth in vv. 9–16, as the voice of the LORD cries out against the city—the wickedness of dishonest scales, the violence of the wealthy, lies and deceit, keeping the statutes of Omri and embracing the works of Ahab. Israel's sentence will be poverty, grief, and desolation. Israel will eat but not be satisfied, store but not save, sow but not reap, tread olives but lack oil, tread grapes but lack wine.

### *The sins of Israel*

Among Israel's sins as addressed by these prophets, three deserve further unpacking. First, Israel is judged for embracing the idolatrous statutes of Omri, who ruled the Northern Kingdom for twelve years (1 Kgs 16:21–23), furthering the proliferation of idol worship by following Jeroboam's example. As Omri's dynasty included his successors—Ahab, Ahaziah, and Joram—their assimilative sins were also associated with such statutes.

Second, the references to Jezreel and the works of Ahab allude pointedly to the travesty of Naboth's vineyard, punctuated repeatedly by the dictum: “the dogs licked up the blood.” As the story of 1 Kings 16 begins, Naboth's vineyard in Jezreel is prosperous, and as it is adjacent to the palace of King Ahab, Queen Jezebel becomes jealous. Ahab offered to purchase it from Naboth, but he refused. His ancestral inheritance would also support his posterity. Upon reporting this to the queen, she devised a plot to have false witnesses claim that Naboth had cursed God and the king. Naboth was thus stoned to death, and Ahab possessed his land. Elijah was then sent from the LORD, saying that as the dogs licked up the blood of Naboth, so shall they do the same to Ahab and Jezebel (vv. 19, 23).

As the narrative continues, Ahab debates whether to go to war with Aram at Ramoth-Gilead (1 Kgs 22). The court prophets assure him that he will be victorious in battle, but when Micaiah is asked to prophesy, he declares that Ahab's going to battle would end in disaster (vv. 14–28). Micaiah is slapped, imprisoned, and ignored, but the king still worries that he might be speaking the truth. Ahab thus goes to battle disguised as an ordinary combatant, but a stray arrow finds its way between his armor and breastplate (v. 34). Propped up in his chariot, King Ahab bleeds out in the chariot, and the dogs lick up his blood (v. 38).

Ahab is followed by Ahaziah and Joram, but Jehu kills them both, putting an end to the house of Ahab (2 Kgs 9). After killing Joram, Jehu instructs his body to be thrown onto the field of poor Naboth in Jezreel. The vineyard is indeed purchased, but with the blood of Ahab's son (v. 26). As Jehu's army approached the palace of Queen Jezebel, she “painted her eyes, and adorned her head, and looked out of a window” (v. 30). After she scolded Jehu for killing his master, Jehu ordered the eunuchs to throw her down, “and some of her blood splattered the wall and the horses as they trampled her underfoot” (v.

<sup>18</sup> Isaiah reflects a Jerusalem perspective, and Micah from Moresheth—a village some twenty miles southwest of Jerusalem—presents a somewhat broader view. Cf. Wilson, *Prophecy and Society*, 274–275.

<sup>19</sup> Chs. 4–5 and 6–7 appear to be added later; and yet, Micah's literary coherence is also clear; cf. Cuffey, *Literary Coherence*.

<sup>20</sup> Wolff, *Micah the Prophet*, 40–41.

<sup>21</sup> Huffmon, “Covenant Lawsuit,” 286–287.

33). After dining, Jehu ordered that Jezebel be buried, as daughter of a king, but when they went to gather her corpse, there was nothing left, except for her skull, hands, and feet. The dogs had indeed devoured her corpse and licked up her blood (vv. 10, 34–37).

A third sin of Israel relates to “bloodshed after bloodshed” (Hos 4:2). In addition to Jehu slaying the sons of the house of Ahab, other assassinations followed. Zachariah was killed by Shallum, and Shallum was killed by Menahem. Then, Pekahiah was slain by Pekah, and Pekah was slain by Hoshea, who was carried off to Assyria by Shalmaneser V in 731 BCE. In addition, the years leading up to the Assyrian invasions were fraught with warfare between Israel and Judah, and later alliances with Egypt also provoked the invasion of the Babylonians. Thus, the prophets were not only spokesmen for the LORD, they were also keen political observers, as watchmen on a tower, performing their assigned duty (Isa 21:8; Eze 3:17; 33:1–20).

### V. The Shalomic and Peaceable Ways of Israel’s God

It is within these larger contexts that the shalomic and peaceable ways of Israel’s God, as presented by Micah, are best understood. The peaceable, just, and loving concern of Israel’s prophets, however, did not begin in the eighth century BCE. Its memory extends back to the prophet Samuel, even in opposition to the rise of the monarchy. As Wilson observes, in narrating the transition from the charismatic leadership of the prophets and judges into the monarchy, Samuel is presented as a prophet like Moses (Deut 18:15–22), whose word comes true as an authentic agent of YHWH.<sup>22</sup> Thus, rather than trust in YHWH for protection and provision, the lateral gaze at Philistine prowess leads people to demand a king like the other nations. God gives them their desire, but in so doing, they are not only abandoning Samuel and the prophets; they are, in Samuel’s view, abandoning theocracy.

#### *Trust in YHWH, not militarism*

On numerous accounts, Israel is called to trust in YHWH rather than militarism. In the hymn of Exodus 15, horse and rider are thrown into the sea (vv. 1, 15); such is the work of God, not humans (Jer 51:21). In Joshua 10, the sun stands still, allowing time for Israel’s victory; Israel is reminded in chapter 24 that their victory came not by sword and bow, but by the hand of the LORD’s power. Judges 7 reminds Israel of God’s provision, lest Israel boast that its own strength has saved it; Isaiah 34 reminds Israel that YHWH’s strong arm is the key to victory. Thus, if they do not stand by God, they will not stand at all (Isa 7:9). Israel is thus called to trust in the LORD and wait patiently rather than fretting over the adversary (Ps 37:1–7).

#### *Swords into plowshares—the peaceable ways of Israel’s God*

Within this context, the peaceable injunctions of Isaiah 2:3 and Micah 4:3 become more understandable. Not only have Israel’s temptations to resort to militarism and foreign alliance riled the wrath of other nations, but Israel’s populace has also strained under the yoke of its military machine. Micah 4:1–4 outlines Israel’s hopes of a peaceable and shalomic existence, wrought by the delivering power of YHWH, no longer under the bondage of Israel’s military overhead and its effects.<sup>23</sup>

First, the ways of Israel’s God reserve the judgment of the nations for God alone, beating swords into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks (Mic 2: 3, Isa 2:4). Second, this is the calling of Zion—the mountain of the LORD’s house, the highest of the nations—to which people will stream, embracing the ethos of the house of Jacob’s God (Mic 1–2a). Third, the desire is for God to teach Israel God’s peaceable ways, in order that they might walk in his paths (v. 2b). Fourth, when that happens, people will finally sit under their vine and fig trees, unafraid (v. 4a). This is why Jerusalem is envisioned as the city of peace (vv. 1–4):

In days to come  
the mountain of the LORD’s house

<sup>22</sup> Wilson, *Prophecy and Society*, 178–180.

<sup>23</sup> Mays, *Micah*, 93–94; see also Isa 2:1–4.

shall be established as the highest of the mountains,  
 and shall be raised up above the hills.  
 Peoples shall stream to it,  
 and many nations shall come and say:  
 "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD,  
 to the house of the God of Jacob;  
 that he may teach us his ways  
 and that we may walk in his paths."  
 For out of Zion shall go forth instruction,  
 and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.  
 He shall judge between many peoples,  
 and shall arbitrate between strong nations far away;  
 they shall beat their swords into plowshares,  
 and their spears into pruning hooks;  
 nation shall not lift up sword against nation,  
 neither shall they learn war anymore;  
 but they shall all sit under their own vines and under their own fig trees,  
 and no one shall make them afraid;  
 for the mouth of the LORD of hosts has spoken.

Micah 4:6–13 then signals hope for a remnant from Babylon (perhaps reflecting later perspectives),<sup>24</sup> and the trampling of the nations that have assembled against Zion is foretold (vv. 11–13). The above passage (cf. also Isaiah 2:1–4) focuses upon Jerusalem and Zion as a light to the nations. Conversely, judgment is pronounced against the arrogance of the nations (vv. 5–22). Haughty eyes will be brought low, and human pride will be humbled (v. 11). The swords and plowshares theme also sounds later, in Joel 3:10, but the order is reversed, calling for beating plowshares into swords. There, the nations that have sold Judah and Jerusalem to the Greeks will indeed be avenged by God, and their deeds will be turned back upon their heads (vv. 1–9). It is the earlier backdrop, however, that establishes the context for Micah 6:8, depicting the shalomic ways of Israel's God.

*On justice, kindness, and walking humbly—what the LORD requires*

Again, within YHWH's court case against the nation in Micah 6, Micah addresses both Israel and Judah, hearkening back to deliverance from Egypt and the challenges of Balak and Balaam in the wilderness (Num 22–24) and the journey from Shittim to Gilgal (Josh 4–5). God has provided for the people in the past; will they not now repent and embrace God's ways of righteousness, justice, and kindness in the present? In this culminative paragraph (Mic 6:6–8), God's ways outlined in the Decalogue are indeed set forth within a dialogical pattern of engagement. The first section puts forth three rhetorical questions with a bit of satire, expecting a negative response in each case.

*1. Religion or repentance?*

Behind these pointed questions, we see the Hebrew prophets being highly critical of Israel's religious practices if not accompanied also by authentic spirituality and upright moral integrity. To obey is better than sacrifice (1 Sam 15:22; Eccl 5:1); God does not delight in sacrifice (Ps 51:16; Isa 1:11). Rather, doing "righteousness and justice is more desirable to the LORD than sacrifice" (Prov 21:3). Some iniquities are so offensive that they cannot be expiated by sacrifices (1 Sam 3:13–14), and animal sacrifices are not really what God wants; God wants righteousness and justice in the land (Ps 40:6; 50:8–9; Eccl 9:2; Jer 6:20). As Hosea 6:6 puts it, "For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings." Thus, in addition to righteousness and justice, God also demands steadfast love and intimacy within the human-divine relationship.

<sup>24</sup> On the diachronic history of Micah's text, chapters 4–5 and 6–7 appear to be later additions to Micah 1–3, while chs. 6–7 certainly reflect Deuteronomistic features; cf. Wilson, *Prophecy and Society*, 274.



The four questions of Micah 6:6–7 pose critiques of religious ceremonialism, echoed later in the teachings of Jesus (Matt 9:13; 12:7). In the first question, bowing before the LORD is fitting (Mic 6:6a), but the second and third questions pose critiques of inauthentic and unrepentant burnt offerings—yearling calves, thousands of rams, and ten thousands of rivers of oil (vv. 6b–7a). The fourth question pointedly addresses child-sacrifice associated with the cult of Molech—offering one’s firstborn or the fruit of one’s body for the sins of one’s soul (v. 7b).

Thus, in the dialogical section, the gauntlet is thrown down, and inadequate answers are thereby exposed. No. God does not delight in animal sacrifices if they are not accompanied by embracing the shalomic ways of God; and pagan human sacrifices are even more detestable. To come before the LORD involves repentant behaviors and attitudes, not simply a transactional offering. It is not outward religious observance that God demands, but inward transformation and devoted adherence to the ways of Israel’s God (vv. 6–7):

“With what shall I come before the LORD,  
and bow myself before God on high?  
Shall I come before him with burnt offerings,  
with calves a year old?  
Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams,  
with ten thousands of rivers of oil?  
Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression,  
the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?”

### 2. *On doing justice and loving kindness ...*

In declaring what the LORD requires of humanity (v. 8ab), this message is not new. It had been conveyed through the Law and the Prophets, and in that sense, the eighth-century prophets were simply calling for personal and societal observance of the Mosaic law. In their radicality, the prophets were also seeking to be covenantally faithful to the shalomic and peaceable ways of God in their provocative and consoling work. Therefore, the LORD has indeed “told you, O mortal, what is good” (v. 8a). If people would really heed the commandments, they would have no other gods before them, would embrace no graven images, would not take God’s name in vain, and would honor Sabbath worship and their parents (Exod 20:2–12). They would not murder, commit adultery, steal, bear false witness, covet neighbors’ possessions (or family members or vineyards!), or bear false witness against one another (vv. 11–17).

What the LORD requires is fearing God, walking in God’s ways, loving God, and serving God with all of one’s heart and soul (Deut 10:12–13). And, keeping God’s commandments—themselves a gift of God’s steadfast love—ensures that both justice and righteousness flow forth like a life-producing stream (Amos 5:4). Therefore, the just, righteous, and loving ways of Israel’s God are exhorted as justice to be practiced, kindness to be loved, and humility to be embodied in Micah 6:8ab.

### 3. *... and walking humbly before God*

Keeping faith with the ways of Israel’s God, however, is not simply a matter of what one does; it also involves the attitude and manner in which one does so. In the admonition to walk humbly before God (v. 8c), Micah declares one of the central values of Israel’s God.<sup>25</sup> Whereas the haughty and arrogant are an affront to the LORD (Ps 101:5; Prov 16:5; 21:24; Isa 2:11–12; Mal 4:1), the humble and righteous are embraced, forgiven, and redeemed (2 Sam 22:28; 2 Kgs 22:19; 2 Chr 12:7; 32:26; Ps 18:27). While foreign kings and rulers are sometimes described as arrogant and defiant (Exod 18:11; 2 Ki 19:28; Isa 10:12; Isa 16:6; Jer 50:29), the wealthy and powerful in Israel and Judah who demonstrate arrogance are also despised by the LORD, and their condemnation is foretold (Ps 10:2). In numerous instances, YHWH’s rejection of human arrogance sounds throughout the biblical corpus, and instruction, understanding, and wisdom are embraced by those who prize humility over personal honor (Prov 15:32–33).<sup>26</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Dawes, “Walking Humbly”; Brueggemann, “Walk Humbly.”

<sup>26</sup> Note also how humility is also embraced by Jesus and the New Testament writers (Matt 11:29; 18:4; 23:12;

Thus, the humble are embraced by the LORD as exhibiting the moral character that embodies God's authentic and truthful ways (Nu 12:3; Ps 29:9; 149:4; Prov 3:34; 11:2; Isa 57:15; Zech 9:9). Humility and modesty thus emblemize virtuous ways of being. They demonstrate that a person is teachable, merciful, and kind. Indeed, these values are extolled because they represent the loving and truthful character of Israel's God. They represent authenticity, faith, and faithfulness—turning from those actions and attitudes that transgress the righteous and just ways of God—and repentance and returning to prayerful and humble ways of being embody what God requires. As the LORD said to Solomon in 2 Chronicles 7:14: "If my people who are called by my name humble themselves, pray, seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land."

## VI. Conclusion

While YHWH is sometimes presented in Hebrew Scripture as a warrior-god who secures Israel's place in the Promised Land, the ways of Israel's God are peace-loving and peace-furthering overall. These shalomic values are central to the righteous, just, and loving character, and Micah 6:8 summarizes the heart of the Mosaic covenant as an exhortation to embrace this ethos in both action and attitude. In so doing, God promises to bless the faithful with peace and prosperity, which allows Israel to become a light to the nations and a blessing to the world. In the face of Assyrian invasions, the eighth-century prophets called for the Northern and Southern kingdoms to repent and live into God's covenantal ways. If so, the LORD's protection and provision would return; if not, destruction is impending. Nonetheless, the catastrophes of the present moment would never be the last word; a remnant would return, and the LORD would once again renew the produce of vine and fig tree in Israel. Peace and prosperity were not and are not simply gifts with which Israel's God desires to bless the world; doing justice, loving mercy, and walking humbly represent the peaceable ways of Israel's God—to be embraced, practiced, and embodied—both then and now.

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