

Who is like Jehovah?
A Meditation on the Prophecy of Micah

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Reading: Micah 1:1; 5:1–2; 7:18–20

The prophet Micah had a very respectable name: *Micayahu*, meaning, ‘Who is like Jehovah?’ Such an idea was central to the faith of Israel—there was no other God. They proudly confessed it: who is like Jehovah compared with all those supposed deities of the pagan world, like Baal?

And so they would name their children accordingly. Think of all the names they gave them, particularly the men folks, that have ‘-jah’ at the end of them.¹ Like Berechiah, meaning blessed of Jehovah. So here we have Micah: who is like Jehovah?

What’s in a name?

Now we would say that we have *Christian* names. I don’t know if you remember how it is we have Christian names. When people were pagans (real pagans), they had pagan names. And when they got converted to Christ, they felt it was not good to have pagan names like Persephone or Clytemnestra or Helen (as Helen of Troy). So they would give their children Christian names. The modern world has forgotten the implication of the term. But in Micah’s day names were understood to mean something, and his parents gave him a name that carried deep significance.

Who indeed?

When we come to chapter 6 of Micah’s prophecy, we see that God had to institute a court of controversy because Israel found God a ‘bore’ and had grown weary of him (see 6:1–5). Yet God reminds them of the way that he had brought his people out of slavery in Egypt and recalls the later incident when Balak, king of Moab went up on the hills to spy out the weakness of Israel and incited Balaam to curse Israel. But God gave the command to bless, and so they were blessed (see Num 22–24).

So does God’s mercy predominate over all things? God had not grown weary of them. Even after their repeated rebellions in the wilderness, it remained his desire to put his name upon them and to bless them (see Num 6:22–27). He would not now give up on his people and allow them to be cursed. For that is not what God is like, as Balak had to learn to his cost:

God is not man, that he should lie, or a son of man, that he should change his mind. Has he said, and will he not do it? Or has he spoken, and will he not fulfil it? (23:19)

¹ Jah is a shortened form of Jehovah, the LORD, or, as it is now more commonly transliterated, Yahweh.

He gave the command to bless, and so it happened. Just as assuredly, there will come one day the fulfilment of God's promised future reign of peace (Mic 4:1–5). 'Has he said and will he not do it?'

How different?

Not only was their God different from pagan gods in his desire to bless them, but in the extent he would go to in order to bring blessing.

Now muster your troops, O daughter of troops; siege is laid against us; with a rod they strike the judge of Israel on the cheek. But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days. (5:1–2)

Even Micah expresses surprise at Bethlehem. If Messiah had come to Jerusalem, we may have concluded that he came for others, but he came in humility to this little village, so we see that he came for us. He came near for us.

How near?

Who is like Jehovah? Why, the man Jesus is; he is Jehovah incarnate! And he came so near that they could take a rod and smite him across the face. Now, if you are going to attack somebody, you would want to think where was the best place to apply a punch of the fist or a slap of the hand. And a slap across the cheek is the final insult. By doing that you would 'deface' him. Who is a God like Jehovah? They took a rod and they slashed it across his face. So near he came.

The pardoning God

Whatever our past, we see here what Micah has written in the final words of his prophecy, in essence signing his name, when he asks, 'Who is a God like you?'

'In what respect?' we might ask. In this respect: what other God 'pardons iniquity, and passes by the transgression of the remnant of his inheritance?' (7:18). O my sister, my brother, this God once came so near that, as the prophecy said, they slapped him across the face. And shall we say our sins have been of a better class, that they're a more polite kind of sin? Our sins have slapped the Lord in his face.

Who is a God like you? Who else, when we have treated him in this way would use that very occasion—the crucifixion of God incarnate—to be the means of our forgiveness? And such forgiveness!

Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity and passing over transgression for the remnant of his inheritance? He does not retain his anger for ever, because he delights in steadfast love. He will again have compassion on us; he will tread our iniquities underfoot. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea. You will show faithfulness to Jacob and steadfast love to Abraham, as you have sworn to our fathers from the days of old. (7:18–20)

How far?

His forgiveness is incomparable. It would require a bold and vivid poet with command of the best of metaphors to come close to an adequate description. God himself has here to use a metaphor to impress on us the wonder of his forgiveness: 'He will cast all their sins into the depths of the sea.' For an Israelite, to cast something into the depths of the sea is to place it where it can never be recovered. 'Who is a God like you?' Through the sacrifice of Calvary, he has taken our sins and put them forever beyond memory and beyond recovery.

We can trust in the utter reliability of his promise. His character—his very name—allows us to rest in what he has said. It is enough to make us want to have the name of God written on our very foreheads, declaring whose we are and whom we serve.

About the Author

DAVID W. GOODING is Professor Emeritus of Old Testament Greek at Queen's University Belfast and a member of the Royal Irish Academy. He has taught the Bible internationally and lectured on both its authenticity and its relevance to philosophy, world religions and daily life. He has published scholarly articles on the Septuagint and Old Testament narratives, as well as expositions of Luke, John, Acts, Hebrews, the New Testament's Use of the Old Testament, and several books addressing arguments against the Bible and the Christian faith. His analysis of the Bible and our world continues to shape the thinking of scholars, teachers and students alike.