

God is Compassionate

SHOULD SINNERS BE PUNISHED OR SHOWN COMPASSION FIRST?

Focal Verses • MICAH 7:14-20

Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will ANALYZE God's mercy even when punishment seems in order, REFLECT on experiences when God's mercy and compassion were more than expected, and CARRY out acts of mercy and compassion.

In Focus

Roger and Becky Altman dreamed of buying a new house after they lost their child so they could start in a home with new memories. They saved enough for the down payment and found a builder. They wanted doors that reminded them of Becky's grandfather's farmhouse. The builder from Jones Construction was not sure if he could have the doors manufactured according to the Altmans' request, but he needed the money, so he assured them there should not be any problems.

A week before their move-in was scheduled, the Altmans went to take a peek at their home. They immediately noticed the doors were not customized to their request. Without hesitation, Becky called the Mr. Jones and explained the actions she would pursue based on what was outlined in the contract. Roger stopped Becky, took the phone, and allowed the builder to explain.

Once he was finished, Roger suggested to his wife that if Mr. Jones could build a shed behind the house that looked like her grandfather's farmhouse, all should be forgiven.

While consequences are essential to maintaining order, they are not always necessary to maintain relationships. Are you more quick to punish or avoid people after mistakes? Or, do you give them opportunities to fix them?



Keep in Mind

“Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? he retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy” (Micah 7:18, KJV).

Focal Verses

KJV **Micah 7:14** Feed thy people with thy rod, the flock of thine heritage, which dwell solitarily in the wood, in the midst of Carmel: let them feed in Bashan and Gilead, as in the days of old.

15 According to the days of thy coming out of the land of Egypt will I shew unto him marvellous things.

16 The nations shall see and be confounded at all their might: they shall lay their hand upon their mouth, their ears shall be deaf.

17 They shall lick the dust like a serpent, they shall move out of their holes like worms of the

earth: they shall be afraid of the LORD our God, and shall fear because of thee.

18 Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? he retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy.

19 He will turn again, he will have compassion upon us; he will subdue our iniquities; and thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea.

20 Thou wilt perform the truth to Jacob, and the mercy to Abraham, which thou hast sworn unto our fathers from the days of old.

The People, Places, and Times

Bashan. The area east of the Jordan River was divided into three parts: the plain, Gilead, and Bashan. Bashan was known as a fertile territory with a multitude of flocks. The Israelites eventually overtook the territory and gave it as an inheritance to the tribe of Manasseh (Deuteronomy 3:3; Joshua 22:7).

Gilead. Gilead is the land that borders Bashan. It was also among the land seized during the battle with King Og, but it is famous for other reasons. The Bible talks about the healing balm that soothed and remedied sickness, which is what the area was known for (Jeremiah 8:22). Gilead became synonymous with God's healing power. Both David and Jesus knew it as a place of retreat.

Staff. The shepherd's staff was used as a walking stick to guide animals and defend the flock. It could be so unique that it could be considered a way of identifying the owner, much like a license presents the identification of its owner. Because shepherds had the daunting task of controlling something larger than them (an entire flock of sheep), it was necessary to have an extension of their hand that would give

them the ability to prod and pull the flock when they went astray or needed direction.

Background

Micah began chapter 7, lamenting the evil and injustice done in Judah. He saw so much that he declared, "Woe is me!" (Micah 7:1, KJV). The people's crimes were so appalling that he likened this season to the time after the summer harvest when no more fruit was left. He wanted to "taste" and experience good things, but none remained; there was violence and extortion, oppression and injustice everywhere he looked.

From this point, Micah spoke a psalm of trust and salvation for Israel. He told them the Lord would not let their enemies gloat over them. This was a prophecy of the fall of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. Additionally, he informed them that one day, their walls would be rebuilt, and foreigners from Assyria to Egypt would come to be part of Israel. At the same time, the rest of the nations would be uninhabited as punishment for what they did to God's people. This led Micah to speak of God's mercy and faithfulness to His people.

At-A-Glance

1. We Need God (Micah 7:14–15)
2. We Acknowledge God (vv. 16–17)
3. We Praise God (vv. 18–20)

In Depth

1. We Need God (Micah 7:14–15)

Micah asks God to care for His people as tender and affectionately as a shepherd oversees his flock. More specifically, he requests divine provision because they are God's children. He uses the imagery of lush pastures in Gilead and Bashan to urge God further to restore the people and the land. Although it may appear to be a monologue, God responds. He interjects a quick, comforting word to assure Micah that He will forgive and restore. Like Micah, who draws from their history, God cites a past experience to confirm that He will continue intervening on the side of Israel.

2. We Acknowledge God (Micah 7:16–17)

After Micah requests favor for Israel, he then asks God to punish their enemies by shaming them and having them acknowledge the limitations of their power compared to the Lord. Micah is very specific when he relays to God the wrath he wants them to receive. Micah's petition is for all their enemies to experience God so His dominance and authority cannot be doubted or disputed. When Micah suggests, "They will come out to meet the LORD" (from v. 17, NLT), this could signify repentance because the nations would have to change their ways. However, Micah wants them to approach God humbly (like snakes, which symbolize the lowest position possible).

3. We Praise God (Micah 7:18–20)

How fitting is it that Micah would begin to praise God? He recognizes that no being on Earth or heaven is as merciful as God and begins praising

Him. After considering the nation's immorality compared to God's grace, Micah boasts of the love and compassion God repeatedly extends through His never-ending forgiveness. Micah rejoices in the covenant between his ancestors and God. He knows that God will honor His promises to Abraham and Jacob, and as such, Israel will always know the covenantal love of God.

Search the Scriptures

1. What is the writer comparing God's people to (Micah 7:14)?
2. What does God take delight in doing (v. 18)?

Discuss the Meaning

1. In what ways are God's love and compassion more than we expect?
2. What type of limits do we place on the compassion we extend to others when they have done wrong?

Liberating Lesson

Compassion feels like a thing of the past, just like chivalry. While this may appear true at first glance, innumerable examples of empathy, forgiveness, and reconciliation suggest otherwise. It happens in households, schools, workplaces, churches, salons, barbershops, restaurants, and other places but simply doesn't go viral on social media. Every day, we face situations where we can turn the other cheek and extend compassion or subject someone to the consequences of their actions. In the same way, although God demands justice, He also has mercy for those who repent. Jesus' work on the Cross fully demonstrates this.

Application for Activation

Think of a specific person you know who has done something wrong. Should that person receive mercy or punishment? Make a point to offer forgiveness to this person, and if possible, alleviate the consequences of the original wrong.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

Sources:

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Say It Correctly

Solitarily. so-li-TA-ri-lee.
Pardoneth. PAR-dun-ith.
Retaineth. ree-TAYN-ith.

Daily Bible Readings

DAY 169

Jeremiah 10–13
Psalm 69:29–36

DAY 170

Jeremiah 14–17
Psalm 70

DAY 171

Jeremiah 18–22
Psalm 71:1–8

DAY 172

Jeremiah 23–25
Psalm 71:9–14

DAY 173

Jeremiah 26–29
Psalm 71:15–18

DAY 174

Jeremiah 30–31
Psalm 71:19–24

DAY 175

Jeremiah 32–34
Psalm 72