

**“Through the Bible in a Year with Pastor Don and the FBC Family”
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Micah 7:1–20. Micah pleads with the Lord.

Acts 15:22–16:5. The second missionary journey.

Job 24:1–11. Caring for the poor and needy in times of our own suffering.

COMMENTS.

Micah 7:1–20. Micah bemoans his nation’s evil and national degeneracy. Like a field that is void of “grapes,” the nation was void of faithful, godly people. Looking for a godly person was as futile as looking for summer fruit after the harvest was over, **7:1-7**. The degeneracy reached every level of society. One could not trust anyone. When truth is no longer the standard for society, then everything starts to fall apart; for faithfulness to our word is the cement that holds society together. It had come to the point where neighbor couldn’t trust neighbor, friends couldn’t trust each other. The basic unit of Jewish society, the family, was quickly falling apart. In fact, Jesus quoted Micah **7:6** in Matt. 10:36: *and a man’s enemies will be those of his own household*. After dwelling on the godlessness of God’s elect, the prophet looked away from the sins of the people and focused on the faithfulness of the Lord: **Micah 7:7** *Therefore I will look to the LORD; I will wait for the God of my salvation; My God will hear me*. He, then, petitions God “to shepherd your people” (**7:14**) and notes the uniqueness of the Lord’s grace: **Micah 7:18** *Who is a God like You, Pardoning iniquity And passing over the transgression of the remnant of His heritage? He does not retain His anger forever, Because He delights in mercy*. Note the beauty of God’s character in the last two verses of Micah: (1) His forgiveness of sins: Micah 7:19, *He will again have compassion on us, And will subdue our iniquities. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea*, and (2) Micah 7:20, *You will give truth to Jacob and mercy to Abraham, Which You have sworn to our fathers From days of old*. So, in the end, God provides unlimited forgiveness and absolute Truth. All of this is possible because of Jesus Christ, who paid the penalty for his people’s sins and is God’s ‘Amen’ to His covenant promises.

By proper knowledge and proper love. Just as true knowledge of God and His offer of forgiveness open up the way for grace benefits, culminating in intimate fellowship with God and His goodness, false knowledge opens up a person to all kinds of evil to creep into his soul. Just as Christ illuminates the life, so Satan and his demons bring darkness into our souls through deception, and along with those evils much misery in the areas of loving the wrong things, vanity, emptiness, and bad thoughts about God. Love for the world, the flesh, and the devil is always connected with false views about God, His grace, and His plan of sanctification. The person who understands the truth that God *casts all of our sins into the depths of the sea*, as per the above passage, can respond to God’s grace plan with great personal love for God. The person who is deceived (false knowledge) into thinking that he must earn God’s forgiveness has opened up his soul to all kinds of satanic doctrines found among the religions of our day as it was in the religious authorities in the days of our Lord—no matter how sweet or attractive the “whitewashed tombstones” may appear. There can be no proper knowledge or proper love apart from a thorough understanding of God’s grace! Legalism in any form brings darkness, evil, and

hardness to any soul. We must avoid it at all costs. To live in the grace of God is to see the beauty of God. To live in legalism is to foster a deep down contempt for God (and others), even if it is not recognized on the surface.

Acts 15:22–16:5. This section contains the second missionary journey. Moreover, the leaders and the whole church (**Acts 15:22**), directed by the Holy Spirit (**Acts 15:28**), made a twofold decision; a doctrinal decision about salvation, and a practical decision about how to live the Christian life. Doctrinally, the church concluded that Jews and Gentiles are all sinners before God and can be saved only by faith in Jesus Christ. There is one need, and there is but one Gospel to meet that need (Gal. 1:6–12). God has today but one program: He is calling out a people for His name. Israel is set aside but not cast away (Rom. 11:1ff); and when God's program for the church is completed, He will begin to fulfill His kingdom promises to the Jews. But all doctrine must lead to duty. James emphasized this in his epistle (James 2:14–26), and so did Paul in his letters. It is not enough for us simply to accept a biblical truth; we must apply it personally in everyday life. Church problems are not solved by passing resolutions, but by practicing the revelations God gives us from His Word. James advised the church to write to the Gentile believers and share the decisions of the conference. This letter asked for obedience to two commands and a willingness to agree to two personal concessions. The two commands were that the believers avoid idolatry and immorality, sins that were especially prevalent among the Gentiles. The two concessions were that they willingly abstain from eating blood and meat from animals that had died by strangulation. The two commands do not create any special problems, for idolatry and immorality have always been wrong in God's sight, both for Jews and Gentiles. But what about the two concessions concerning food? Keep in mind that the early church did a great deal of eating together and practicing of hospitality. Most churches met in homes, and some assemblies held a "love feast" in conjunction with the Lord's Supper (1 Cor. 11:17–34). It was probably not much different from our own potluck dinners. If the Gentile believers ate food that the Jewish believers considered "unclean," this would cause division in the church. Paul dealt clearly with this whole problem in Romans 14–15. The prohibition against eating blood was actually given by God before the time of the Law (Gen. 9:4), and it was repeated by Moses (Lev. 17:11–14; Deut. 12:23). If an animal is killed by strangulation, some of the blood will remain in the body and make the meat unfit for Jews to eat. Hence, the admonition against strangulation. "Kosher" meat is meat that comes from clean animals that have been killed properly so that the blood has been totally drained from the body. It is beautiful to see that this letter expressed the loving unity of people who had once been debating with each other and defending opposing views. The legalistic Jews willingly gave up insisting that the Gentiles had to be circumcised to be saved, and the Gentiles willingly accepted a change in their eating habits. It was a loving compromise that did not in any way affect the truth of the Gospel or the spiritual life.

By proper knowledge and by proper love. God is adamant about separation from idolatry and certain relationships with the unsaved. Note 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1, *Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? 15 And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? 16 And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they*

shall be My people." 17 Therefore "Come out from among them And be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, And I will receive you." 18 "I will be a Father to you, And you shall be My sons and daughters, Says the LORD Almighty. Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." The wonderful promises of the indwelling of God are inextricably tied to separation from the ungodly. As I have noted in the past, while one can separate mentally from a pagan co-worker, this is not possible in intimate relationships, which demand a mutually active exchange or interchange of ideas with deep sympathy and empathy. In short, one can work with an unbeliever pagan or have a friendly relationship with an unbeliever neighbor. However, one cannot become intimate with an unbeliever without it affecting one's relationship with God, Christ, and the Christian faith. How can one share in the things of Christ with one who has rejected Him? How can there be a Christ-centered life when Christ is excluded from any intimate relationship? One cannot grow in proper knowledge and love of Christ and deny Him first place in all things. Each person must choose, as it should be in any love relationship. Given that the above passage in 2 Corinthians speaks of God indwelling the believer, I would like to provide some metaphysical insight into the indwelling of God. Due to lack of development of metaphysics, many believers have the mistaken idea that God indwells some people and does not indwell others. If you ask them, "but is not God omnipresent?" they will quickly recognize the problem: How can God be omnipresent and be in this person (believer) but not in another person (unbeliever)? Metaphysical realism explains what is otherwise inexplicable. God is "in" every person giving him (and everything that exists, every cell) existence and preserving all natures through His presence. This means that, without exception, God is "in" every part of a person giving him existence moment by moment—there is no existential inertia in Christianity (like deism). As the Bible puts it, "in Him (Christ) all things exist." "All" means all: believer, unbeliever, and everything that exists. But what about those passages like the one above, and many others, where God promises to bless believers by indwelling them? Is He not already in them? Yes, He is. He is "in" (I use quotes because God is not an extended Being so He is not literally in space) everything, but He is in everything sustaining everything according to their natures. He is in the unbeliever sustaining the natural unbeliever as a natural human being. When He is in a believer He is communicating *supernatural being to him*. And as the believer lives with God *by knowledge and by love*, God communicates more supernatural virtue to Him as the believer becomes a partaker of God, sharing in the very Being of God (read 2 Pet. 1:4).

Job 24:1–11. In this section, Job points out injustices throughout the country. The poor have their landmarks removed (24:2), and their flocks seized (24:2-3); they are insulted (24:4), reduced to gleaning the corners of the field (24:6), to sleeping without enough covering (24:7–8), to working for less than a living wage (24:11). It is a moving picture, says Job; but it does not move God, who seems to pay no attention to the cries of the poor (24:12).

By proper knowledge and by proper love. Job is to be commended for seeing other peoples' troubles in this world besides his own. Too often, personal suffering can make us selfish and even blind us to the needs of others, but Job was concerned that God did not seem to be helping others who were hurting. His three friends were treating the

problem of suffering in the abstract and were obviously detached from (blind to!) the realism of human suffering around them. Could they not see the injustices in this broken world? Must they ascribe all pain and suffering to personal sins of the sufferer? Are there not baby girls raped by their mother's boyfriends and small children dying of cancer? Are we do ascribe their suffering as a result of *their* sinfulness? God forbid! It is easy to be callous to the problems and pains of fellow human beings. It is easy not to care about our neighbors and justify it by finding some fault in them. Recall that Jesus had the same problem with the Jewish lawyer who wanted to discuss "neighborliness," but not discover who his neighbor was and then try to help him (Luke 10:25–37). Injustices in society cause a good deal of pain in people's lives, and we should certainly do all we can to uphold the law and promote justice. One of these days, the Lord Jesus Christ will return, judge the wicked, and establish His righteous kingdom. Till He comes, we will have to accept the reality of evil in this world and keep praying, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus" (Rev. 22:20). Let us not forget that the Lord said that the reason that entire Old Testament was written was to enable us to love God and others (Matt. 22:37-40). *Proper knowledge of God and proper love of God* always leads to proper love of others as the believer shares in the love of God Himself (read 1 John 4). James 1:27, *Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world.* In sum, Christ delights in Christians who are aware of the needy and actually seek to share Christ's love for them in word and deed, read Deut. 15:11; Isa. 58:7; Prov. 31:8-9; Matt. 25:41-45; 1 John 3:17. Living as a Christian means to be Christ-like—not only by those who profess Him as their Lord and Savior, but those who possess Him in their actions (concurrence). We have noted in our study of fellowship, that fellowship is all about sharing in something with God; in this case it would be in His concern for the poor and needy. It should be noted that on a national level, God judges nations that do not care for the poor and needy, be it some liberals who use the poor for pawns and votes or by some conservatives who care more for their dogs and cats than fellow suffering human beings. Note what God says about Sodom and Gomorrah: Ezekiel 16:49, *Look, this was the iniquity of your sister Sodom: She and her daughter had pride, fullness of food, and abundance of idleness; neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy.* Apparently, God does care! This Job would see, but he is not there yet.

Life in the Lord by proper knowledge and by proper love.

Pastor Don