

TEXT: Micah 6:1-8

THEME: THE LORD REASONS WITH HIS PEOPLE

1. The LORD Brings Suit against His People
2. The LORD Has Given His Inerrant Word
3. The LORD Has Rescued Us from Our Shame

**Listen to what the LORD says: "Stand up, plead your case before the mountains; let the hills hear what you have to say. Hear, O mountains, the LORD's accusation; listen, you everlasting foundations of the earth. For the LORD has a case against his people; he is lodging a charge against Israel. "My people, what have I done to you? How have I burdened you? Answer me. I brought you up out of Egypt and redeemed you from the land of slavery. I sent Moses to lead you, also Aaron and Miriam. My people, remember what Balak king of Moab counseled and what Balaam son of Beor answered. Remember [your journey] from Shittim to Gilgal, that you may know the righteous acts of the LORD." With what shall I come before the LORD and bow down before the exalted God? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God. NIV**

Dear Christian Friends:

In the prophet Micah's day, Israel was a rather prosperous nation. The land enjoyed a degree of peace. The people were somewhat regular in their observance of the rites and sacrifices at the temple...at least outwardly.

However, the veneer of respectability was wafer thin. The Lord said, "**You rulers...despise justice and distort all that is right...judge for a bribe...teach for a price...tell fortunes for money**" (Micah 3:9,11). He said, "**The godly have been swept from the land; not one upright man remains. All men lie in wait to shed blood; each hunts his brother with a net. Both hands are skilled in doing evil; the ruler demands gifts, the judge accepts bribes**" (Micah 7:2-3). What appeared respectable was anything but respectable!

The Lord could not allow such a situation to continue among his people so he put them on trial in his court. He said, "**Stand up, plead your case before the mountains; let the hills hear what you have to say.**" The Lord's jury, the mountains, would not accept bribes. His witnesses, the hills, would speak the truth, because they had seen everything the Lord had done for them.

The Lord accuses us in his court, too. And our defense is no stronger than that of the people of Micah's day. Our sins may be of a different sort but they are still violations of God's will. They are still punishable by death. We still stand convicted before God.

But the Lord convened another court long before the world began, because he is **“patient...not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9)**. In this court another person has taken the place of the accused—you and me. Jesus, the Savior, has borne the punishment of the Lord’s condemnation against sin. The ancient hills, if asked, will bear witness against the sins they have seen us commit. But they will also bear witness that we have a Savior who has died for our sins and risen to life, so that our sins are forgiven and we can live a new life to God right now.

To tell us this, THE LORD HAS GIVEN HIS INERRANT WORD. In the courtroom scene of our text, God is speaking to his people and defends his record, listing the blessings he had given to his people. Wicked King Balak of Moab was so terrified by the arrival of the Israelites into his territory that he hired the false prophet Balaam to prophesy against them. At first, Balaam refused even to meet with the king. Finally he went. But try as he might, he could not curse the Israelites. Instead, he spoke a blessing on them, not once, not twice, but three times! The Lord even caused Balaam to speak a beautiful prophecy about the coming Messiah: **“A star will come out of Jacob; a scepter will rise out of Israel.”** But the same prophecy was a horrible curse upon Moab: **“He will crush the foreheads of Moab, the skulls of all the sons of Sheth” (Numbers 24:17)**.

There are many false prophets around today, right here in the Tri-Cities. And God does not always prevent them from speaking their lies as he prevented Balaam. But God has not left us, his people, at the mercy of the false prophets either. He provides precious and reliable protection in his inerrant Word—his Word that has no errors, no lies, no mistakes of any kind.

As long as we live in a sinful world, we also face the danger of false prophets coming to us in sheep’s clothing. We should not expect the false teachers of our day to be any less persistent than Balak and Balaam in their attempts to lead us astray. They will take many different approaches. One year it might be new age religion. The next it will be false ecumenism—the idea that since we all worship the same God, there is no need to sweat the minor differences we have over a 6-day creation, the virgin birth, homosexuality, the role of men and women, fellowship, the sacraments, the physical resurrection of Jesus, or that Jesus is the only way to heaven. (I hope you realize that there are no “minor” differences and that we must tenaciously hang onto every bit of God’s holy Word or we will lose it all.) The next it will be secular humanism—putting man above God. The next it will be lure of the feel-good entertainment of the mega churches.

But the Word of the Lord is always at hand for us. When we are told that we must earn our own salvation, the Word tells us clearly (read this aloud with me), **“A man is justified by faith apart from observing the law” (Romans 3:28)**. When we are told that the Bible has errors, the Word tells us plainly (read this aloud with me), **“Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth” (John 17:17)**. When we are told that the world and even mankind came into being by chance, the Word tells us truthfully (read this aloud with me), **“Every house is built by someone, but God is the builder of everything” (Hebrews 3:4)**. And if someone says that God does not want us as his children because of how sinful we have been, the Word says (read this aloud with me), **“If anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the**

**atonement sacrifice for our sins, and not only ours but also for the sins of the whole world” (1 John 2:1-2).**

Yes, THE LORD HAS RESCUED US FROM OUR SHAME. The Lord delivered the Israelites from wicked King Balak and the false prophet Balaam, but would also need to deliver them from themselves. No sooner had Balaam returned home than the men of Israel began to indulge in immorality with Moabite women while they were camped at Shittim. The women invited them to join in sacrificing to their gods, and the Israelites bowed down before the gods of the Moabites. They joined in the worship of the Baal of Peor. This was detestable to the Lord.

The Lord intervened though and ordered Moses to put to death those who had joined in this lewd and lascivious idolatry. God also sent a plague that killed 24,000 Israelites. It was a gruesome price to pay but not out of keeping with the crimes of idolatry and adultery the people had committed. The Lord’s intervention halted the wickedness and preserved the line of the Savior.

From Shittim the Israelites traveled across the Jordan and camped at Gilgal on the plains of Jericho. There they celebrated the Passover and ate some of the produce of the land. There the manna stopped appearing in the morning because it was no longer needed. True to his promise, God had brought the people to the Promised Land. He forgave their sins and kept his covenant, his promise.

How could the Israelites have forgotten their journey from Shittim to Gilgal? But they had. So the Lord reminded them of it in his recitation of the many blessings he had given them.

How often the Lord has delivered each of us from shameful thoughts and deeds! With the stern warning of the law he has led us to see our sin. With the threat of damnation for our sins he has struck our consciences with terror. And with the Savior’s work of atonement he has washed away our sins and delivered us safe once more into the promised land. His steadfast love and mercy have never deserted us in spite of the many times we have deserted and disappointed him. One day he will take us from the danger and temptations of this world into perfect security and joy in paradise. Until then, he remains faithful to his promises. And that gives us the strength to live for him in this sinful world. Amen.

## Prayer of the Church

How many are our sins against you, O Lord? Forgive us for Jesus' sake, and enable us to live upright lives to your glory. Help us remember the many times you have delivered us from the evil paths we chose to follow, and lead us to refuse to go down those paths again.

Preserve, O Lord, your Word as a lamp to our feet and a light for our path. Give us minds that both know your Word and heed it in temptation.

Heavenly Father, keep us mindful of your great blessings so that we may live our lives in gratitude for your kindness.

Almighty Father, giver of life and health, we pray for Laura Bender as she undergoes eye surgery this week. We ask you to guide the surgeon and preserve her eyesight so that Laura may continue to serve you and return to her work quickly. We also pray for all who are sick and suffering, especially Dan Jacobs as he battles cancer, and Ken Fogelsonger as he recovers from knee surgery. Grant that in the midst of pain they may be comforted by your presence and sustained by your love. If it be your gracious will, restore them to health.

We ask all this in the precious name of our Savior, Jesus, who has taught us to pray:

THE LORD'S PRAYER