

# GOD Is Compassionate

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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).

## Say It Correctly

Solitarily – so-li-TA-ri-lee

Pardoneth – PAR-dun-ith

Retaineth – ree-TAYN-ith

## KJV

### Micah 7:14–20

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.

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**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.

## NLT

### **Micah 7:14–20**

**14** O LORD, protect your people with your shepherd's staff; lead your flock, your special possession. Though they live alone in a thicket on the heights of Mount Carmel, let them graze in the fertile pastures of Bashan and Gilead as they did long ago.

**15** "Yes," says the LORD, "I will do mighty miracles for you, like those I did when I rescued you from slavery in Egypt."

**16** All the nations of the world will stand amazed at what the LORD will do for you. They will be embarrassed at their feeble power. They will cover their mouths in silent awe, deaf to everything around them.

**17** Like snakes crawling from their holes, they will come out to meet the LORD our God. They will fear him greatly, trembling in terror at his presence.

**18** Where is another God like you, who pardons the guilt of the remnant, overlooking the sins of his special people? You will not stay angry with your people forever, because you delight in showing unfailing love.

**19** Once again you will have compassion on us. You will trample our sins under your feet and throw them into the depths of the ocean!

**20** You will show us your faithfulness and unfailing love as you promised to our ancestors Abraham and Jacob long ago.

## 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

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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

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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.

## More Light on the Text

**Micah 7:14–20, KJV**

**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.**

Starting with the relational image of a shepherd, Micah prays for the fulfillment of the promised salvation and restoration in verses 11–13 (v. 14). The prayer is reminiscent of Psalm 23:4, where David portrays the Lord as a Shepherd, who with loving care, leads His sheep with the rod and the staff. The people of God are called the flock of His inheritance or possession. They belong to Him (cf. Micah 7:14; Psalms 94:14, 100:3). But Israel is dwelling solitarily in the field. Dwelling “solitarily in the wood” is probably used to stress that they were not living in a good situation. Not only is their ground poor, but they are also cut off from other people and cannot get goods or help from them. So, Micah prays that their Shepherd will once again let them feed in Bashan and Gilead, cities with proverbially fruitful pasturelands. This may also have been a prayer for the return of that rich and fertile land to the people of Zion (Zechariah 10:10). “As in the days of old” could refer to the time of Moses and Joshua, when the Israelites first occupied those regions (Deuteronomy 3:1–4), or to the kingdoms of David and Solomon, when those areas were securely in their possession (cf. 1 Kings 4:7–13).

**15 According to the days of thy coming out of the land of Egypt will I shew unto him marvellous things.** God gives an answer to the prophet's prayer. He will protect, save, defend, and work miracles for them in their restoration, such as He did for their fathers in their return from Egypt to the Promised Land. God showed them His wonders then, and He will do it again. His future acts for them will include similar displays of His redemptive grace and power on their behalf. With the restoration of Israel, Micah anticipates manifestations of God's power and leadership, like those at the Red Sea, Sinai, and other cities along the Exodus out of Egypt.

**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.**

When the Lord begins to work miracles for His people again, His activity will dramatically affect the nations around them, just as it did on the Egyptians at the time of the Exodus. They will see this and be confounded despite all their might because when they see the mighty acts of God, they will realize how weak they really are. The nations who thought they were so strong will realize that their strength is nothing compared to God's power and will be ashamed of their strength instead of proud. They will be so shocked that they can neither speak nor hear. They will lay their hands on their mouths in awe and amazement. Their ears will become deaf, perhaps meaning that they will turn a deaf ear to all this; they do not want to hear anything more about the Lord's powerful redemptive acts for His people.

**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.**

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Micah continues describing the heathen nations' reaction to the Lord's miracles and again uses symbolic actions. "They shall lick the dust like a serpent, they shall move out of their holes like worms of the earth" are two parallel lines expressing a single idea. It is a graphic way to show the humiliation of the nations, and lying with their faces in the dust (like snakes) shows how weak and lowly they are. The expression "lick the dust like a snake" may have Genesis 3:14 as its background and may also be compared to the modern idiom "to bite the dust," symbolizing death in defeat (cf. Psalm 72:9). Finally, the nations will come trembling out of their hiding places. They will turn in fear to the Lord and will be afraid of Him.

### **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.**

Verse 18 opens with a rhetorical question, "Who is a God like unto thee...?" The answer expected is clearly that there is no one like God. The question here affirms God's incomparability, particularly in His forgiving love and grace. The characteristic that sets Him apart is His ability and willingness to forgive sin. God's forgiveness "pardoneth" (Heb. *nasa'*, **NAH**-sah) iniquity. To pardon (Heb. *nasa'*, **NAH**-sah) means to "lift," "carry," "raise," or "take away." The enormous weight of our sins is lifted up and taken away by a merciful God. It is not like the imperfect forgiveness people offer, but complete, free, bottomless, boundless, and absolute.

God lifting our sins away is further emphasized in the verse when it reads that He "passeth" by the transgression and "retaineth not" His anger. He may be angry with His people when they sin, but once they have repented or been punished, He delighteth (Heb. *khafets*, **KHAH**-fets) or takes pleasure in showing mercy. God is more ready to save than to destroy. Nothing can please Him better than having the opportunity to show mercy to the sinner.

### **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.**

Because He is such a mighty and faithful God, as described in verse 18, "he will turn again." His face has been long turned from His people because of their sins. But He will have compassion upon His people. He will rid His people of their iniquities. Though their sins have been mighty, He will bring them down. The theme recalls the treatment of their enemies in verse 10. To further accentuate the extent of His forgiveness, He will cast all their sins into the depths of the sea—He will fully pardon them. The word "compassion" suggests a tender, maternal love. In Hebrew, it is a verb (*rakham*, rah-**KHAHM**; "to show mercy or compassion"), and it has the same root as the word "womb" (Heb. *rekhem*, **REH**-khem; womb, compassion, mercy). This root is frequently used to describe God's characteristics of care and nurture in the Old Testament (Exodus 33:19; Isaiah 14:1; Zechariah 10:6). The Hebrew word for "subdue," *kâbash* (kaw-bash'), paints the picture of sin as an enemy that God conquers and liberates His people from (cf. Romans 6:14). God overcomes sin and sets His people free.

The book of Micah, despite its threats of punishment and judgment in the earlier chapters, ends on a note of joy and confidence that the nation will eventually enjoy a restored relationship with the Lord. In concluding his prophecy, Micah sees God's future work as continuing His covenants and promises to the Israelites' ancestors. He knows that the same love, compassion, and mercy He showed their parents was available to them if they received it in faith. Regardless of His people's moral and spiritual decline, God can be relied on to be faithful to His covenant promises.

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## **Daily Bible Readings**

### **MONDAY**

Jeremiah 10:13  
Psalm 69:29–36

### **TUESDAY**

Jeremiah 14–17  
Psalm 70

### **WEDNESDAY**

Jeremiah 18–22  
Psalm 71:1–8

### **THURSDAY**

Jeremiah 23–25  
Psalm 71:9–14

### **FRIDAY**

Jeremiah 26–29  
Psalm 71:15–18

### **SATURDAY**

Jeremiah 30–31  
Psalm 71:19–24

### **SUNDAY**

Jeremiah 32–34  
Psalm 72