

Bible Notes: Micah 2**Overview:**

In this second chapter, the reasons for the doom announced on Israel in the first chapter are laid out. Judgement is served, says Micah, upon a group in Israel (or, to be more precise, the Southern Kingdom of Judah) who have economically exploited others – exploited them so far as to deprive them of land and home, piling up wealth for themselves at others' expense (2:1-5). The opposition of this group to Micah's message is predicted: they will say that preaching like Micah's is unacceptable, that God is not a fierce judge, that his patience with his people cannot be exhausted and that Judah/Israel can rest secure in his promises. Micah's scorn for such teaching is clear – it is like wine or liquor: attractive at first, it is intoxicating, then incapacitating and ultimately deadly. People who follow it head into their doom (2:6-11). However, there is hope on the far side of judgment: 2:12-13 imagines a coming time when the kingdom will be refounded, gathered around a royal figure who embodies the presence of God Himself, who will lead his people to freedom. Unsurprisingly, Christians have seen in this hope an anticipation of the coming of Jesus.

Things to think about...

Christians today are often anxious to distance themselves from the 'violent' or 'exclusive' God of the Old Testament. He sits rather uneasily with our high estimate of the values of moderation and tolerance in ourselves, and of love and mercy in God. Jesus' God is so much *nicer* than Old Testament YHWH, we're tempted to say. There might *perhaps* be something in that contrast, but this week's chapter is one of many that suggests we should be rather cautious about making it. God's people, it suggests, have *always* been reluctant to think of God's justice, of His insistence that our whole lives – economic, political and social as well as personal – should reflect his Kingship. It is much easier and nicer to think that the Micahs of this world have it wrong, and that one should not listen to them, for 'disgrace will not overtake us' (2:6). We should at least consider the possibility that we could repeat the same mistake, and kid ourselves that our life together is fundamentally fine in God's sight, that there is nothing about how we conduct ourselves which is abominable (that, incidentally, is

the sense of the 'uncleanness which destroys with grievous destruction' in 2:10: Micah's point is that the greed of the rich has so polluted the people of Israel/Judah that their land has lost its character as God's dwelling place, and as a place of sabbath rest for His people.)

If there was an abomination, what would it be? According to Micah, the thing that most outrages God is the exploitation of the poor and the weak by the rich and the powerful.

There is of course more than enough of *that* going round in our society: think of the behaviour in the Royal Bank of Scotland small business lending unit exposed only last week, or ask whether those Congolese miners who dig the cobalt needed for all our new electrical car batteries will really receive the full fruit of the labours. And of course, abuse of power goes far beyond the economic: the abortion statistics for 2018 last week showed the number of abortions in England and Wales rising above 200,000? You don't have to be opposed to abortion in all circumstances to suspect that in at least some of those cases, what's really going on is just the discarding of the weak, the unwanted, the inconvenient. Whether it's embryos or mining or banking, the key point is this: it's the people who you consider insignificant, who have disappeared off your moral radar and no longer make you worry about how you treat them – it's in your dealings with them that your relationship with God is made or broken.

There's a fascinating expression in 2:1. The words translated in the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) 'because it is in their power' actually read in Hebrew as 'for their hand is a god.' The sense seems to be: why do they do make schemes, and steal the land of others? They do so, because they can – because they're clever and resourceful and in love with their own power and success. Their 'hand' – their ability, their power – has become their 'god': what they worship above all is their own competence and skill. They can't restrain themselves – even if at some level of their being, they can sense the disaster such self-worship will bring. Shades here, perhaps, of our culture's inability to discipline its technological prowess – because we *can* interfere, say, with the gene code of species and embryos, we *will*, often before pausing to reflect on the massive moral questions involved. Or of the way in which financial whizz-kids designed patterns of transaction so complex and arcane that few understood them, and which helped lead the world into financial chaos in 2008. Their hand was their god. Micah, along with so much of the Bible, suggests that what we desperately need to learn is self-restraint.