

BIBLE TEACHING AND WORSHIP GUIDE



FOR THE HOME-BASED CHURCH

Produced Weekly

God's Judgment and His Mercy
Micah 1:1-2:3; 7:1-7

Copy this sheet for the Gathering Time, Bible Study, and Worship Experience leaders for the next meeting of the church.

Leaders' Responsibilities:

Important: Each person who will be leading one of the three parts of a session during a series of sessions needs to have access to the "Introduction" article found at the beginning of each series (Bible Teaching #....). The weekly session "Background" located in the Teacher Preparation is much more specific to that day's study.

1. **The Gathering Time Leader** will gather all of the people together and help them prepare their minds and hearts for a wonderful worship experience before God. His/her responsibility is to introduce the congregation to the theme (content) and the Scripture that will be central to their worship experience for the day.

2. **The Bible Study Leader** will then help the people understand what the Scriptures have to say and teach us about the content of the study for the day. He/she will guide the people to make a general application of the study (ie: How does this Bible study apply to people today?)

3. **The Worship Time Leader** has the responsibility to use the theme and Scriptures to guide the congregation to make personal commitments to God's will for each one in regard to the study for the day. He/she will use others to lead in the music, taking the offering, ministry moment comments, and other activities and parts of the **Worship Time** that can aid in participatory worship.

Prior to this Coming Session:

Gathering Time Leader: Make enough copies of the Call to Worship which is given at the end of the Worship Time materials so that everyone can have a copy. The group will all be participating in the Call to Worship.

Bible Study Leader:

Write the following on a white board or large piece of paper:

The grace of a warning (1:1-7)

The grace of an intercessor (1:8-16; 7:1-7)

The grace of justice (2:1-11)

The grace of hope (2:12-13)

Worship Time Leader:

Place the white board or large piece of paper used in the Bible study time in a prominent place so that is visible as you lead the worship time.

Music Sources:

Speak, O Lord, *The Worship Hymnal* # 432; CCLI # 4615235

Shine, Jesus, Shine, *The Worship Hymnal* #491; CCLI # 30426

Step by Step, *The Worship Hymnal* #480; CCLI # 696994

Grace Alone, *The Worship Hymnal* #112; CCLI # 2335524

1

Copy this section for the Gathering Time leader.

Gathering Time: (Suggested time: 15 minutes)

God's Judgment and His Mercy

Focal Text

Micah 1:1-2:3; 7:1-7

Background Text

Micah 1-2, 7:1-7

Main Idea

God's announcement of judgment on sin is an act of his mercy, calling people to repentance.

Question to Explore

How can the announcement of God's judgment also be an act of his love?

Teaching Aim

1. That those who are walking in sin would hear God's call to repentance.
2. That members would step forward as intercessors for sinners to repent and find God's mercy.
3. That learners would gain a vision of hope, that God's purpose and plan would go on even beyond today's heartache and pain.

Gathering together:

Sing:

Speak, O Lord, *The Worship Hymnal* # 432; CCLI # 4615235

First thoughts:

Today's Bible study and worship experience will focus on God's mercy and judgment which are always in evidence in the relationship of God and His people. In the book of Micah, there is emphasis on God's judgment, because the people had chosen to do as they wished for so many years. Throughout the reign of three kings, Micah had reminded the people of God's demands for holy living. Destruction was to come, but God's mercy was always available to those who chose to live as God instructed.

Our Scripture reading which we will read as a group emphasizes the mercy we have received through Christ's death and resurrection:

Worship Leader: For while we were still helpless, at the appointed moment, Christ died for the ungodly. For rarely will someone die for a just person – though for a good person perhaps someone might even dare to die.

Worshippers: But God proves His own love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us!

Worship Leader: Much more than, since we have now been declared righteous by His blood, we will be saved through Him from wrath.

Worshippers: For if, while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, then how much more, having been reconciled, will we be saved by His life!

Worship Leader: And not only that, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

Everyone: The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

(Romans 5: 6-11 2 Peter: 3:9)

Closing the Gathering Time:

Take time at this point to mention items of prayer concern for the church, announcements of ministry or activities, and anything else that needs to be shared with or by the congregation. Pray for these needs. Remember to praise God in prayer.

Break time! Take five minutes between sessions. Encourage children to use the washroom so that they won't need to leave during the Bible Study time.

Distribute youth/adult Bible study outlines or paper for note-taking, if available.

Also hand out the activity sheets for preschool and younger children to use during Bible Study and/or worship.

2

Copy this section for the Bible Study leader.

Note to the Bible Study Leader: Suggested teaching time for the Bible study should be about 35 minutes. Use the “Teacher Preparation” for your personal study during the week before the session. Use the “Bible Study Plan” for the actual session.

Teacher Preparation

God's Judgment and His Mercy

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Introduction to your personal study:

There are two ways I could order a "two-topping" pizza, for instance, sausage and mushrooms. A two-topping can come in halves – one side has the mushrooms and the other has the sausage. If I wanted "mushroom pizza," I would get a slice from one half or "sausage pizza" from the other. The other way of getting a two-topping pizza is to have both toppings scattered over the entire pizza. With each bite I would get mushrooms and sausage.

When we think about God, his "attributes" (personal characteristics) are usually grouped in two categories, his holiness (e.g. justice, righteousness) and his love (e.g. mercy, benevolence). Some think of God as "bi-polar," that sometimes he acts out of his holiness and at other times he acts out of his love. The problem with that view is that it is not biblical. God can never be any less than who he is. The God of the Bible is kind of like a two-topping pizza with both toppings scattered over the whole. Whenever you experience the God of scripture you get "holy love" (or "loving holiness"). Whenever God acts in holiness he also acts in love. God's mercy always accompanies his judgment. God's "law" is always couched in his "grace." God clearly describes this part of his nature in Ezekiel 18:23, "***Do I take any pleasure in the death of the wicked (holiness)? declares the Sovereign Lord. Rather, am I not pleased when they turn from their wicked ways and live (love)?***" God's mercy accompanies his judgment.

This view of God is extremely important to remember when studying the prophets, especially when the prophets are preaching God's judgment. God's announcement of judgment on sinners is at the same time a call to repent so that they would not face his judgment. As much as God chooses to honour the choices people make (even those that will destroy them), God is far more pleased instead when sinners choose to change their ways, repent and find his mercy (2 Peter 3:9).

Background:

Please ask for and read the information contained in the "**Introduction**" article found at the beginning of this series (Bible Teaching #....) of Bible Study and Worship sessions. Whoever downloaded this session for you should have that material for you, as well.

The prophet Micah served in the southern kingdom of Judah in the 8th century BC. He was from the town of Moresheth, in the country about 25 miles southwest of Jerusalem, serving roughly about the same time that Isaiah was prophesying in Jerusalem. In his day a wealthy merchant class was growing and many poorer farmers found themselves at the mercy of government-supported businessmen. Business dealings and legal transactions became more and more corrupt, and the foundations of the nation began to crumble. Religious leaders were concerned more about making money than teaching God's word. God's chosen people, people redeemed by his mercy, drawn into covenant with their Savior, and given God's holy direction in his law, looked and acted like the pagan nations, even though the activities at the temple in Jerusalem were busy and well-attended. Into this setting God called this country preacher, filled with God's spirit and armed with God's word to call God's people to repentance.

Focusing on the Meaning:

The grace of a warning.

"The Sovereign Lord will be a witness against you" (1:1-7)

Micah pictured "the Sovereign Lord" on his throne in his holy temple/palace in heaven (Psalm 11:4) coming down to earth to bring his legal case and judge his people. The creator of the whole earth would "tread on the high places/mountains" of the earth (v. 3), which in the ancient world were seen as the supporting structure for the earth, holding up the firmament of the heavens (Job 9:5-6; Psalm 18:7) and anchoring the flat earth to the waters beneath (Deuteronomy 32:22; Psalm 18:15; 46:2-3; Jonah 2:6; Habakkuk 3:10). But when the Sovereign Lord comes down to judge, the very mountains would "melt beneath him" (v. 4), and even the universe would be affected by his presence. The coming of the Sovereign Lord would change the world.

Verse 5 explains why the Lord would leave his throne and "come down" – "because of Jacob's transgression, because of the sins of the house of Israel." The term "transgression" literally means "rebellion," a willful criminal breaking of a covenant (1 Kings 12:19; Jeremiah 2:29), and the deliberate rejection of God's authority. The term "sins" means missing a target (Judges 20:16; Proverbs 19:2), in this case God's holy requirements. Samaria and Jerusalem were the capital cities of the northern and southern kingdoms respectively. Micah compared the worship in the temple in Jerusalem to the pagan worship of the "high places" in the north.

God would therefore destroy Samaria, an event that happened within 30 years in 722 BC (2 Kings 17:3-6). The pagan practice of Baal worship involved temple prostitutes employed to increase fertility and wealth, but the Assyrian invaders steal their money and employ their own prostitutes. Israel's sins were so bad that pagan enemies could do little worse.

This is an announcement of God's judgment. Where is his mercy and grace? He sent a prophet to call his people to repentance so that the judgment may not happen if the people would only listen. Micah described his ministry with, ***"But as for me, I am filled with power, and with the Spirit of the Lord, and with justice and might, to declare to Jacob his transgression, to Israel his sin"*** (3:8).

The grace of an intercessor.

"Because of this I will weep and wail" (1:8-16; 7:1-7)

1:8-16

Micah declared that the southern kingdom of Judah faced God's judgment even as the northern kingdom would. He grieved over the towns of Judah that would be destroyed, even his hometown of Moresheth (v. 14). Micah used a series of wordplays and puns to grab the people's attention. In Hebrew, most either rhyme or in some way sound like the word he used for judgment to help the message stick in his hearers' minds. Even as David announced God's enemies in Gath to rejoice over Israel's destruction (2 Samuel 1:1:20), Micah did not want the conquering Assyrians to gloat in their upcoming victory (v. 10). The "house of dust" (Beth Ophrah) would "roll in the dust;" and the town of "Pleasant" (Shaphir) was about to have a very unpleasant experience. Zaanan (sounds like "go out") would not go out to help its neighbors, and "the house of taking away" (Beth Ezel) would take away any defense it might give. The town of "Bitterness"

(Maroth) was about to go through a very bitter experience as God's judgment passed through on the way to Jerusalem. Lachish (sounds like "team of horses") would need to hitch their team for a fast getaway, and like a father giving bridal gifts to his daughter as she goes away, Lachish would say goodbye to Moresheh (sounds like "betrothed"). "Deceptive" (Achzib) will be of no help, and "Conqueror" (Mareshah) will be conquered. Like David fled from his enemies to Adullam (1 Samuel 22:1; 2 Samuel 23:13), so would Israel's leaders flee.

The frightening aspect of Micah's prophecy for his listeners is that the God of Israel would be the one bringing judgment upon Israel. Yahweh said "I will bring" this disaster upon them. Yahweh was ready to come in judgment upon his people if they did not repent.

7:1-7

As Micah saw his society, his beloved people, disintegrate before his eyes, he was heartbroken. Like someone walking through a fruit orchard after everything had been picked, Micah found no good fruit in the community. He found no "godly" or "upright" people left. In the land was bloodshed, corruption, and wickedness, what he described as "briars" and "thorns" (vv. 1-4). The day the "watchmen" (i.e. the prophets; Ezekiel 3:17; Hosea 9:8) announced of God's coming judgment was soon to arrive. Total "confusion" or panic among the people would be the result (v. 4; cf. Isaiah 22:5), in fact, it had already begun. The very fabric of society was falling apart, demonstrated by the fact that homes and family relationships had disintegrated (vv. 5-6).

Micah cried out to God as he asked for his nation to be transformed. Despite all of the evil and wickedness surrounding him, Yahweh was still on his throne, "I will watch in hope for the Lord" (v. 7). Salvation will only come from God, and Micah would pray and "wait" till God would hear and answer his prayers. He prayed with the calm assurance to "my God," the source of his strength and the answer to his every need. With his focus upon his God, Micah could see the situation of his people from God's perspective, that is, true reality (cf. Numbers 14:6-9; 1 Samuel 17:45-47).

It has been stated that the only thing worse than being lost is being lost and no one is looking for you. In that same vein, the only thing worse than facing God's judgment is facing God's judgment and no one is praying for you. In God's grace he sent an intercessor for Israel, a watchman to warn, and a prayer warrior to beg for God's mercy. Might God's people be spared because someone cared enough to pray for them (Genesis 19:29)?

The grace of justice.

"Woe to those who plan iniquity and plot evil" (2:1-11)

This passage describes the sad state of the Israelite community, clearly displaying the social evils of Micah's day. Rich and powerful landlords were destroying the community through their greed and violence, believing that right and wrong was determined by the one with the most power. Their covetousness and greed caused them to "seize," "take,"

and "defraud" people of the property God had given them (vv. 1-2). No matter if their actions were legal or illegal, God's holy law would not allow someone to deprive people of the "inheritance" God had given to them (Genesis 31:14; Leviticus 19:13; 25:23-34; 1 Kings 21:4). In light of this ("therefore") God would exact his judgment on the evildoers (vv. 3-5), when enemies would invade the land and divide it among themselves.

The false prophets of his day spoke otherwise. They preached only God's love and not his holy wrath on sin, only half of the truth (Exodus 34:6-7), saying, "Has God lost his patience? Would God indeed judge his people?" (v. 7). They picked and chose the parts of the scripture that made them feel better, wanting "their ears tickled" with only uplifting and comforting messages that would make them feel better (cf. 2 Timothy 4:3-4). The false prophets of his day spoke lies of an easy life, of "plenty of wine and beer," a religion of that catered to their self-indulgence, not of a life that demands God's righteousness and holiness (v. 11). Instead, God responded that his true word would be a blessing to the one who is "upright" (v. 7), but to those who are wicked his word would bring "disaster" (v. 3), the judgment that they deserved.

The grace of hope.

"I will surely bring together the remnant of Israel" (2:12-13)

The false prophets preached that God's judgment would not fall, but Micah promised that salvation would come after God's judgment. A righteous "remnant" would survive. God would gather them like a good shepherd (Isaiah 40:11), and he would lead them once more as their "king" and "Lord." In the midst of the false promises of the day of a utopia with no judgment, Micah brought a note of realism and truth. God's holiness must judge sin, but God's love must offer mercy.

Your Goal as the Leader of this Bible Study:

The key to understanding and relating this passage to your church is to embrace the idea that God sent the prophet Micah with his message in order to bring his sinful people to repentance (3:8). The preaching of Micah was an act of God's grace towards his people with the intent that the people would listen to him and bring about the necessary changes in their lives. The message of God's judgment on sin is also an act of his mercy – he does not want to bring judgment but would much rather extend his grace (Ezekiel 18:23). God sent a warning, sent an intercessor, would bring justice, and extended hope to a people who had gone astray from their covenant God and partner.

Some members of the Bible study group may need to hear God's call to repentance from their sinful ways. They need to come face-to-face with God's righteous judgment that must come on their sin. Some are not ready to hear yet, and they need an intercessor, one of God's people who would weep and pray on their behalf for their repentance and God's mercy. Some need a vision of hope, that God's purpose and plan would go on even beyond today's heartache and pain.

For Personal Reflection:

What have I learned from this study?

What personal experience does this lesson bring to mind?

What is one action I will take this week to apply this Scripture passage to my life?

Bible Study Plan (Suggested time: 35 minutes)

God's Judgment and His Mercy

Regroup the church after the Gathering Time and break by singing a chorus that young children can relate to—or another praise chorus if your congregation does not have children. Children who go to their own Bible teaching session should stay with the group until after this song. Have the preschoolers and children accompany the hymn with rhythm sticks, maracas, bells, etc.

Begin by helping the group locate the Focal Text in their Bibles. Also, share with them the Main Idea to be learned from the Scriptures, and the Questions to be Explored by the group.

Focal Text

Micah 1:1-2:3; 7:1-7

Background Text

Micah 1-2, 7:1-7

Main Idea

God's announcement of judgment on sin is an act of his mercy, calling people to repentance.

Question to Explore

How can the announcement of God's judgment also be an act of his love?

Teaching Aim

1. That those who are walking in sin would hear God's call to repentance.
2. That members would step forward as intercessors for sinners to repent and find God's mercy.
3. That learners would gain a vision of hope, that God's purpose and plan would go on even beyond today's heartache and pain.

Connect with Life:

As the group gathers, ask them this riddle: "How many different ways can a person get a two-topping pizza?"

Explain the illustration in the introduction to the **Teacher Preparation**.

Then ask the question: "If God's two main characteristics are his holiness and his love, then which way would God present himself, in halves or fully integrated throughout?"

Explain that God can never be any less than he is – he is *always* holy and he is *always* loving. With him we receive "holy love" or "loving holiness."

Using the material in the **Teacher Preparation** introduction, explain how this view is necessary to understand the message of the Old Testament prophets.

Use the **Teacher Preparation** to give a brief background for the prophet Micah and his message to the people of his day.

Explain that the same God who called people to repentance in Micah's day still does the same today.

State: "God's announcement of judgment on sin is actually an act of his mercy, calling people to repentance."

That begs a question: "How can the announcement of God's judgment also be an act of his love?"

Guide the Study:

On a white board or large piece of paper write the following:

The grace of a warning (1:1-7)

The grace of an intercessor (1:8-16; 7:1-7)

The grace of justice (2:1-11)

The grace of hope (2:12-13)

The grace of a warning (1:1-7)

Have someone read 1:1-7

Then ask these questions to open the text for study and discussion:

"Was God 'coming down' to his people supposed to be a source of comfort or fear (vv. 1-3)?" [fear, he would come down to judge his people (v. 2)]

"What would happen to the created world when God came down to judge (v. 4)?"

"Why was God coming down to judge his people (v. 5)?"

From the teacher's notes, explain the significance of Samaria and Jerusalem and the sins that were taking place there.

Explain also the timeframe when God's judgment fell on Samaria after Micah's prophecy and how God judged them for their sin.

Have someone read 3:8 and explain that Micah describes how and why God sent him to prophesy.

Ask: "What was God's purpose to send Micah to announce his judgment of the people's sin?"

Add: "Did he want to send the judgment, or was he seeking some sort of response?"
Have someone read Ezekiel 18:23.

Open a brief discussion: "What is God's greatest desire, his judgment or his mercy?"

The grace of an intercessor (1:8-16; 7:1-7)

Have someone read 1:8-16.

Explain how Micah used a series of wordplays and puns to grab the people's attention. In Hebrew, most either rhyme or in some way sound like the word he used for judgment to help the message stick in his hearers' minds.

Use the teacher's notes to help the class understand how the town names symbolized God's judgment.

V. 10 – Gath sounds like the Hebrew for tell. Beth Ophrah means house of dust.

V. 11 – Shaphir means pleasant. Zaanah sounds like the Hebrew for come out.

V. 12 – Maroth sounds like the Hebrew for bitter.

V. 13 – Lachish sounds like the Hebrew for team.

V. 14 – Aczib means deception.

V. 15 – Mareshah sounds like the Hebrew for conquerer.

Have the class look specifically at verses 8-9 and ask: "What was Micah's attitude as he delivered God's message of upcoming destruction?"

Look specifically at verse 12 and question the group: "Even though a foreign enemy would come to attack God's people, who was actually the power behind the destruction?"

Have someone read 7:1-7.

Pose these questions:

"What is Micah's attitude here as he observes the state of his community (v. 1)?"

"How bad had his society become (vv. 2-6)?"

"Where would he turn with his pain (v. 7)?"

"Knowing that God had announced his judgment on Judah (v. 4), what was the cry of his heart to God (v. 8)?"

State: "It has been stated that the only thing worse than being lost is being lost and no one is looking for you. In that same vein, the only thing worse than facing God's judgment is facing God's judgment and no one is praying for you."

Seek a response to this: "How was the ministry of Micah a demonstration of God's grace?"

Encourage answers: "Might God's people be spared because someone cared enough to pray for them (Genesis 19:29)?" (Refers to Abraham's prayer for Sodom in Genesis 18: 16-33).

The grace of justice (2:1-11)

Have someone read 2:1-5.

State: "Imagine that you were a poor landowner in Micah's day."

Now ask: How were you being treated by the rich and powerful people?"

Explain that a person's "inheritance" was a portion of the land granted by God to the family (Genesis 31:14; Leviticus 19:13; 25:23-34; 1 Kings 21:4).

Ask: "If God is a just God, then would he turn a blind eye to such injustice?"

Have someone read 2:6-11.

Offer these questions:

"What was the message of the false prophets (vv. 6-7)?"

Were they convinced that God's judgment was coming?"

How did these false prophets describe the 'easy life' that God supposedly had for his people (v. 11)?"

Encourage the group to examine the end of verse 7 carefully.

Ask: "How would God's true word make a difference in people's lives?"

Continue: "In the face of injustice, how would a just and holy God respond (v. 3)?"

The grace of hope (2:12-13)

Have someone read 2:12-13.

State: "The false prophets preached that God's judgment would not fall, but what was Micah's message instead (v. 12)?"

Present these "thought" questions:

"Does Micah's teaching of a 'remnant' of the people mean that God's people would be spared the judgment?"

"When would God's salvation come, before his judgment fell or afterward?"

"What word picture of God use in verse 12 for how God would treat the remnant of his people?"

State, "In the midst of the false promises of the day of a utopia with no judgment, Micah brought a note of realism and truth. God's holiness *must* judge sin, but God's love *must* offer mercy."

Encourage Application:

If you have two or more youth, this is the time to give them the **Youth!!! Take Ten** page and allow them to move away from the adults and apply the lesson by and for themselves.

In light of what we have studied in God's word today:

1. What does God want me to *believe*?
2. What does God want me to *do*?
3. Is there a *promise* here I need to claim?
4. Is there an *example* I need to follow?, or to avoid?

Take a five minute break to separate the Bible Study and Worship Time. Children may need to use the washroom again before worship.

YOUTH!!! TAKE TEN

Bible Study Application for Youth

You may wish to move away from the adults for the final five to ten minutes of the Bible study and help each other as youth to apply the lesson to your own needs.

God's Judgment and His Mercy Micah 1:1-2:3; 7:1-7

A youth will lead the following activity and comments. No adults need to be present. If possible, teens should take turns in leading the application time.

JUDGMENT? MERCY?

Make a list of some things in today's world which indicate that present-day culture is much like ancient Israel.

What happens to the truly poor people in the town where you live?

How do rich people make more money?

Why is the sex-trade industry flourishing?

Add to the list.

How can Christians sound a warning to our culture without seeming overly pious and judgmental?

Worship Time (Suggested time: 30 minutes)***God's Judgment and His Mercy***
Micah 1:1-2:3; 7:1-7**Beginning the Service:**

Sing one or both:

Shine, Jesus, Shine, *The Worship Hymnal* #491; CCLI # 30426
Step by Step, *The Worship Hymnal* #480; CCLI # 696994

Offering:**Praying for the World:**

On the Saturday before Easter in 2014, there was a joint gathering in the Roma (gypsy) churches. What a spectacle it was - with the bright costumes, lively singing and dancing and a powerful evangelistic service with great response. There is mighty movement of God taking place among those living in the Transylvania region of Romania. Thank God for this and pray for these people as they follow in a life of discipleship.

Sharing Guide:

This sharing guide is written to assist the person who directs the worship time to reemphasize the teaching for the day and help guide the congregation to respond to God's call and will for their lives in regard to the scripture studied. The leader may choose to follow the guide closely. Or, he or she may wish to only use it to give direction and a concept for preparing an original message. The leader is free to choose other ways to communicate and share the concepts presented here.

Wanting everyone to come to repentance.

The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. 2 Peter: 3:9

In his writing, Peter is speaking to those believers who are questioning the second coming of Christ. Some had said "***Where is this 'coming' he promised? Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation.***" 2 Peter 3: 4.

He writes words that are very true of our own generation ***First of all you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. 2 Peter 3:3.***

He goes on to emphasize that God's judgement will come. God's timing is not our time. ***But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like a day. V. 8.***

He then repeats the beautiful truth of our focus today: ***The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. 2 Peter: 3:9***

The Bible study emphasized the following:

The grace of a warning
The grace of an intercessor
The grace of justice
The grace of hope

We can see these concepts reflected in the verse in 2 Peter. There will be those who perish. The New Testament writers speak of the climatic end of the world and the return of Christ. Peter uses dramatic language ***But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare.*** (V. 10)

Perhaps the most serious task before the Christian believer today is that of sounding the warning with grace and love. The Old Testament prophets spoke clearly and forcefully. But they spoke to Covenant people. These were people who knew the teachings of the Law; they were even involved in regular worship. Micah compared the worship in the temple in Jerusalem to the pagan worship of the "high places" in the north. These were a people who had forsaken the teachings of their noble heritage.

Many of the people with whom we associate today have no such heritage. They have a different faith background or no faith background at all. The values which seem so important to us as Christians have no meaning to them. The concept of the grace of an

intercessor is so very important here. If we care for our neighbour, our city, our country and perceive it in need of a warning about God's justice and grace, then our first task is that of intercessor. With our faithful prayer on behalf of others, opportunities for a positive witness can and will occur. That faithful prayer may need to last for years before we see a changed heart and life.

The false prophets of Micah's day asked **"Has God lost his patience? Would God indeed judge his people?"** (v. 7). They picked and chose the parts of the scripture that made them feel better, wanting "their ears tickled" with only uplifting and comforting messages that would make them feel better (cf. 2 Timothy 4:3-4). The false prophets of his day spoke lies of an easy life, of "plenty of wine and beer," a religion of that catered to their self-indulgence, not of a life that demands God's righteousness and holiness (v. 11). This is true of our day as well. It is a temptation to us to emphasize only God's mercy and not speak of His righteousness and holiness. But the "grace of justice" is aware that some will perish because they choose to continue in sin and ignore the call to salvation.

However, many will never hear the call to salvation. They will never know that it really is true that God is ***not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.*** The hope of the Israelites was that after God's justice was administered, there would be a "remnant" or a remaining few who would return from exile and begin to rebuild Israel. The hope for today's people is more immediate. God does want all to come to repentance and his offer of salvation is available to all people ***For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.*** (John 3: 16-18).

The author of the Bible study emphasized that "God's holiness must judge sin, but God's love must offer mercy." May we carefully share these truths with our neighbours, friends, co-workers this week. May we be wise and prayerful as we do so.

Call to Commitment:

Sing:

Grace Alone, The Worship Hymnal #112; CCLI # 2335524

Concluding the Service: You may choose to repeat the Call to Worship used in the Gathering Time.

Lead the following reading with the congregation. Make enough copies for each participant to have one to use during the Gathering Time.

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God's Judgment and His Mercy – 19-46-01-en

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Worship Leader: For while we were still helpless, at the appointed moment, Christ died for the ungodly. For rarely will someone die for a just person – though for a good person perhaps someone might even dare to die.

Worshippers: But God proves His own love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us!

Worship Leader: Much more then, since we have now been declared righteous by His blood, we will be saved through Him from wrath.

Worshippers: For if, while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, then how much more, having been reconciled, will we be saved by His life!

Worship Leader: And not only that, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

Everyone: The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. (Romans 5: 6-11 2 Peter: 3:9)

------(Cut here)-----

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