

The Testimony of a Repeat Offender

Read Micah 7.18-20

I / INTRODUCTION: RECIDIVISM

1 / **RECIDIVISM: the tendency of a convicted criminal to re-offend / or more fully, it refers to a person's relapse into criminal behavior, often after the person receives sanctions or undergoes intervention for a previous crime.** [It comes from the Latin word *'recidivus'* meaning 'to fall back']

2 / That's why I'm calling this lesson "The testimony of a repeat offender." Because that's precisely what Micah is confessing here – that they [the kingdoms of Israel and Judah both] have repeatedly re-offended by committing the same sins, iniquities, and transgressions ... over and over again ... for centuries and generation after generation ... even from the first and earliest days when Yahweh had delivered them from bondage and slavery in Egypt – right up to this very day when Micah is delivering these messages and penning these prophetic words.

II / ISRAEL'S HISTORY AND RECORD OF RECIDIVISM

1 / We have seen this pattern over and over again as we have surveyed, summarized, and studied these Minor Prophets over the recent weeks. We also saw this recidivism brought to their attention by Yahweh by His prophet Jeremiah in **Jeremiah 7.22-26:**

For in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, I did not speak to your fathers or command them concerning burnt offerings and sacrifices. ²³ But this command I gave them: 'Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and you shall be my people. And walk in all the way that I command you, that it may be well with you.' ²⁴ But they did not obey or incline their ear, but walked in their own counsels and the stubbornness of their evil hearts, and went backward and not forward. ²⁵ From the day that your fathers came out of the land of Egypt to this day, I have persistently sent all my servants the prophets to them, day after day. ²⁶ Yet they did not listen to me or incline their ear, but stiffened their neck. They did worse than their fathers.

2 / And again in **Jeremiah 11.6-8:**

And the LORD said to me, "Proclaim all these words in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem: Hear the words of this covenant and do them. ⁷ For I solemnly warned your fathers when I brought them up out of the land of Egypt, warning them persistently, even to this day, saying, Obey my voice. ⁸ Yet they did not obey or incline their ear, but everyone walked in the stubbornness of his evil heart. Therefore I brought upon them all the words of this covenant, which I commanded them to do, but they did not."

3 / Perhaps the most convicting and damning of indictments against the southern kingdom Judah was also delivered by Jeremiah ... this one was delivered during the days of Josiah when they were going through a short season of superficial reformations, though Yahweh exposed that their hearts were not in them – they were only done in pretense. But the indictment is brought against them that they should have learned from the judgments that fell upon their brethren in the northern kingdom Israel when the Assyrians came against them and destroyed their capital city and carried them off into captivity ... but did Judah do any differently? No! They persisted in their recidivism – and continued to perpetuate their repeat offenses against Yahweh. Listen to this scathing indictment! **Jeremiah 3.6-11:**

The LORD said to me in the days of King Josiah: "Have you seen what she did, that faithless one, Israel, how she went up on every high hill and under every green tree, and there played the whore? ⁷ And I thought, 'After she has done all this she will return to me,' but she did not return, and her treacherous sister Judah saw it. ⁸ She saw that for all the adulteries of that faithless one, Israel, I had sent her away with a decree of divorce. Yet her treacherous sister Judah did not fear, but she too went and played the whore. ⁹ Because she took her whoredom lightly, she polluted the land, committing adultery with stone and

tree.¹⁰ Yet for all this her treacherous sister Judah did not return to me with her whole heart, but in pretense, declares the LORD.”¹¹ And the Lord said to me, “Faithless Israel has shown herself more righteous than treacherous Judah.”

4 / So, you understand now what **recidivism** means ... and what it means to recidivate – and how the kingdoms of Israel and Judah repeatedly and consistently relapsed into the same practices and patterns of disobedience, transgressions, disobediences, lawlessness, faithlessness, treachery, betrayal, and rebellion against Yahweh ... even as He was just as repeatedly and consistently loving them, teaching them, instructing them, warning them, and calling them back – to return to Him with confessions of their sins and repentance from them. But they would not!

5 / Therefore, the judgments Yahweh had warned them would come ... did come upon them. Yahweh must be true to His own character of Holiness and righteousness. Sin must be punished.

III / BUT MERCY IS ALWAYS PROMISED, ALWAYS IN VIEW – YET TO COME!

1 / But, at the same time, even while Yahweh was condemning their sins and bringing His Holy and just punishments upon them for their faithlessness ... He was also promising them His full, complete, and perfect salvation that would be given them in times to come. He would call these future times to come ‘the latter days,’ or ‘in that day.’ **These are the days that would come ‘in the fullness of time’ ... and they would be fulfilled in Jesus Christ and His Gospel!**

2 / Just here in the Book of Micah, even as Yahweh issues His indictments, witnesses, evidences, judgments, and sentences against them ... He also points ahead to His promised salvation that would come ‘in the latter days’: **ch 4.1-8; 5.2-5; 7.11-17** – and especially here in this concluding hymn and prayer in **ch 7.18-20**.

IV / THE TESTIMONY OF A REPEAT OFFENDER

1 / This is, first of all, a personal confession by Micah. He is taking his own place among his recidivating people. He is confessing that he himself also is a repeat offender. And who among us has not often done the same thing? Every one of us has had to come to God with our confession of sin with words like: “Father, I have sinned again. I knew better. I have sinned like this over and over, and I have again. I confess...I repent. You have forgiven me for this sin over and over ... but here I am again. I have done it again” – or similar words to that effect. Micah is joining in with ‘the remnant of His inheritance’ who have been saved and spared from final death and destruction. He is admitting that he himself is one of these whose repetitive sins have been repeatedly pardoned.

2 / It is also a wordplay on his own name as he recognizes and extols the uniqueness of this pardoning God. Micah’s very name is a rhetorical question: “Who is like Yahweh?” When Micah asks this question: ‘Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity...,’ he is acknowledging that there is no other god like Yahweh our God! And what sets Yahweh apart from all the rest of the false/fake gods is that He is a God who forgives sinners! Every one of these descriptors of Yahweh pivots and hinges on His ‘mercy’ or ‘steadfast love’ as the word is variously translated. The word that Micah uses here is ‘hesed’ [or ‘chesed’] and it means a love that will not let the beloved one go. The love that tenaciously holds on. The love that persistently, consistently, faithfully, and repeatedly forgives ... but without compromising its own Holiness, character, or integrity.

3 / No other god among all the myriad pantheons of the idolaters could claim such a pardoning God like Yahweh, our God! And the glory and splendor of His pardoning, forgiving, redeeming love is one of the most unrivalled of all His graces!

4 / One of my very favorite songs for over 50 years is **Great God of Wonders by Samuel Davies [1723-1761]**. I’ve made a blog post about it that you can access here:

<https://daveparksblog.com/2022/11/26/great-god-of-wonders-who-is-a-pardoning-god-like-thee/>

Here is what I have written:

Another hymn we learned and sang in our church back during the 70s when we committed to learning every hymn in our hymnal. This hymn is never far from my mind and memory.

I have preached on this text before and called it “The Testimony of a Repeat Offender.”
Here are the words to the verses...

**1. Great God of wonders! All Thy ways
Are matchless, Godlike and divine;
But the fair glories of Thy grace
More godlike and unrivaled shine,
More godlike and unrivaled shine.**

[Refrain]

*Who is a pardoning God like Thee?
Or who has grace so rich and free?
Or who has grace so rich and free?*

**2. Crimes of such horror to forgive,
Such guilty, daring worms to spare;
This is Thy grand prerogative,
And none shall in the honor share,
And none shall in the honor share. *[Refrain]***

**3. Angels and men, resign your claim
To pity, mercy, love and grace:
These glories crown Jehovah’s name
With an incomparable glaze
With an incomparable glaze. *[Refrain]***

**4. In wonder lost, with trembling joy,
We take the pardon of our God:
Pardon for crimes of deepest dye,
A pardon bought with Jesus’ blood,
A pardon bought with Jesus’ blood. *[Refrain]***

**5. O may this strange, this matchless grace,
This godlike miracle of love,
Fill the whole earth with grateful praise,
And all th’angelic choirs above,
And all th’angelic choirs above. *[Refrain]***

5 / Micah also wrote this hymn in an ancient literary arrangement called a *chiasm*. A chiasm is a series of lines or ideas that are lined out one after the other until they reach a climactic summary ... and then they are repeated again in reverse order from how they were first expressed. For example: here in **Micah 7.18-20**, the statements of God’s unrivalled uniqueness are lined out this way:

Who is a God like you that...

- A. pardons iniquity**
- B. passes over transgression**
- C. does not retain anger**
- D. delights in steadfast love [hesed] (this is the climax)**
- C’. shows compassion**
- B’. treads down iniquities**
- A’. casts away sins.**

So, **A - C** build up to **D**, and then repeat/re-state themselves in other words and reverse order in **C' - A'**. ALL climaxing in **“Who is a God like you ... because He delights in steadfast love?”** All of this is another reiteration of Yahweh’s glory that He revealed to Moses in **Exodus 33.17-23**. On that occasion also Yahweh distinguished Himself as the only God – and certainly the only God of His kind – who pardons, forgives, and shows steadfast love in forgiveness.

6 / But still...all of this begs the question: *“But wait...if Yahweh is a God of justice, righteousness, and Holiness who demands and requires that every sin must be punished and paid for through the death of the transgressor... then how can He pardon iniquity? How can He pass over transgression? How does He tread all our iniquities under His feet? How can He be Holy and yet just cast all our sins into the depths of the sea?”* These are fair questions, but Yahweh provides the answers in ways that only He can!

7 / **The promise of hope, redemption, forgiveness, pardon, and salvation can be accomplished ONLY by Yahweh’s bearing of the guilt and the moral, legal payment for that guilt UPON HIMSELF! And that’s exactly what He is promising and what He provided for us in Jesus Christ through His Gospel!** One of the rich keys can be found in that word **‘pardoning...’** The same word for **‘pardon’** here is the common word used all throughout the Old Testament for *‘lift up,’ ‘bear/carry away.’* In fact, Micah himself uses the same word throughout his messages to mean these other things [see ch 2.4; 4.3; 6.16; 7.9]. Then he comes here to **ch 7.18** to mean **‘pardon.’** The way God **‘pardons’** our iniquities and transgressions and sins is by *‘lifting them up, bearing them and carrying them away upon Himself’!* Micah’s contemporary, Isaiah, uses the same word in **Isaiah 53.4 & 12: ‘Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows...’ and ‘...He bore the sin of many.’** Isaiah is prophesying and promising that Jesus Christ, Yahweh’s Suffering Servant, would come **‘in the latter days’ ‘in the fullness of time’** and lift up, bear, carry away upon Himself the guilt and punishment of our sins! Jesus Christ would be punished by the very wrath of God that our sins deserved – the sins we have repeatedly committed ... our personal recidivisms!

8 / **This, my friend, is the Good News of the Gospel of Jesus Christ!** The recidivisms of us repeat offenders – ALL of it has been laid on Jesus Christ! And He has lifted it all up and borne it all on Himself on His Cross ... and by making satisfactory payment for it by His death, **He has carried it all away!** In truth, our sin that He has paid for by His substitutionary death on His Cross is so gone ... so far away gone ... so gone for good ... that it may be said: **“You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea.”**

9 / THAT is how pardoned you are by believing in the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. Yahweh did all this in faithfulness to the covenant promises of steadfast love that He made to Abraham [see v 20 here]. That promise was that He, Yahweh, would give the blessing of His eternal covenant love to Abraham’s ‘seed’ or offspring [**Genesis 12.1-7**]. Yahweh must do that! He said He would! He promised! Paul will tell us in **Galatians 3.16** that this ‘seed’ or offspring to whom Yahweh made these promises was none other than Jesus Christ Himself! God will keep His promises to His Son! And when we commit all our faith and trust on Him to save us from our sins, then we become pardoned by this very same grace!

**She will bear a son, and you shall call His Name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.
/ Matthew 1.20**

...as He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from of old, that we should be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us; to show the mercy promised to our father Abraham... / Luke 1.70-73

**I have also attempted to tell this same story in this poem:
<https://daveparksblog.com/2017/06/27/by-his-stripes-we-are-healed/>**