

Micah 6:8

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?

Analysis

This verse stands as one of Scripture's most concise summaries of genuine religion. Following verses 6-7 where Micah sarcastically describes escalating but worthless offerings (thousands of rams, rivers of oil, even child sacrifice), verse 8 cuts through religious pretense to essential requirements. "He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good" (higgid lekha adam mah-tov) declares God has already revealed what He requires—no mystery, no complexity, just clear divine instruction through His Word.

"And what doth the LORD require of thee" (u-mah-Yahweh doresh mimkha) poses the ultimate question. The verb darash (require, seek, demand) indicates God's non-negotiable expectations for covenant relationship. Three requirements follow: "but to do justly" (ki im-asot mishpat)—live righteously according to God's law, particularly regarding social justice. "To love mercy" (ahavat chesed)—cherish covenant loyalty, kindness, and faithful love. "And to walk humbly with thy God" (hatsnea lekhet im-Eloheikha)—live in modest, submissive relationship with God, acknowledging His lordship.

These three phrases summarize the prophetic critique of Israel's religion. Justice (mishpat) addresses social ethics—fair courts, protection for vulnerable, honest business. Mercy (chesed) addresses covenant relationships—loyal love toward God and neighbor. Humility (hatsnea) addresses heart posture—recognition of dependence on God versus arrogant self-sufficiency. Together they demonstrate

true religion integrates right action (justice), right affections (mercy), and right relationship (humility). Ritual divorced from ethics is worthless; God demands transformed lives, not mere ceremonial compliance.

Historical Context

Micah 6:1-8 presents God's covenant lawsuit (*rib*) against Israel. Verses 3-5 recount God's gracious acts (Exodus, provision of Moses/Aaron/Miriam, protection from Balaam). Despite this history, Israel reduced relationship with God to external ritual—multiplying sacrifices while oppressing the poor, perverting justice, and living arrogantly. The reference to child sacrifice (v. 7) may allude to practices introduced under wicked King Ahaz (2 Kings 16:3) or Manasseh (2 Kings 21:6)—desperate attempts to manipulate God through horrific offerings.

Micah 6:8 echoes and condenses themes from earlier prophets. Amos demanded "let judgment run down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream" (Amos 5:24). Hosea declared "I desired mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings" (Hosea 6:6). Isaiah condemned those who "draw near with their mouth...but have removed their heart far from me" (Isaiah 29:13). Micah synthesizes these critiques: God values ethics over ritual, heart over ceremony, obedience over sacrifice.

Jesus quotes Hosea 6:6 twice (Matthew 9:13, 12:7), affirming this prophetic principle. He condemned Pharisees who meticulously tithed herbs while "omitting the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith" (Matthew 23:23). James defines "pure religion" as caring for orphans/widows and keeping oneself unspotted from the world (James 1:27). Micah 6:8 thus bridges testaments, defining genuine faith as justice, mercy, and humility lived *coram Deo* (before God's face).

Related Passages

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

Study Questions

1. How does Micah 6:8 expose the danger of substituting religious activity for genuine obedience and transformed character?
2. In what specific ways should justice, mercy, and humility shape your daily decisions, relationships, and priorities?
3. What modern forms of religious performance mirror Israel's attempt to please God with ritual while ignoring His ethical demands?

Interlinear Text

וְהָיָה יֵד	לְךָ	אֵין לְךָ	מָה	טוֹב	וְהָיָה	
He hath shewed	H0	thee O man	H4100	what is good	H4100	
H5046		H120		H2896		
וְהָיָה יְהוָה	דוֹרֵשׁ	מִמֶּךָ	כִּי	אִם	עָשׂוֹת	מִשְׁפָּט
and what doth the LORD	require	H4480	H3588	H518	of thee but to do	justly
H3068	H1875				H6213	H4941
וְהָיָה חַסְדִּים	וְהָיָה עַל	לְכַתּוּב	עִם	אֵלֶיךָ:		
and to love	mercy	humbly	H1980	H5973	with thy God	
H160	H2617	H6800			H430	

Additional Cross-References

Proverbs 21:3 (Righteousness): To do justice and judgment is more acceptable to the LORD than sacrifice.

Colossians 3:12 (Love): Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering;

Jeremiah 22:3 (Righteousness): Thus saith the LORD; Execute ye judgment and righteousness, and deliver the spoiled out of the hand of the oppressor: and do no wrong, do no violence to the stranger, the fatherless, nor the widow, neither shed innocent blood in this place.

1 Samuel 15:22 (References Lord): And Samuel said, Hath the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams.

Hosea 6:6 (Grace): For I desired mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings.

Isaiah 66:2 (References Lord): For all those things hath mine hand made, and all those things have been, saith the LORD: but to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word.

1 Peter 3:8 (Love): Finally, be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous:

Luke 6:36 (Grace): Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful.

Amos 5:24 (Righteousness): But let judgment run down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream.

Luke 11:42 (Love): But woe unto you, Pharisees! for ye tithe mint and rue and all manner of herbs, and pass over judgment and the love of God: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone.