

“The Bottom Line”

January 29, 2017



Hebrew-Judeo-Xian-Islamic Western Epochs

It is helpful to consider “time” as being a 4th dimension in what we normally see - at least physically - as a three dimensional world: one of Width and Height and Depth.

In order to grasp what the prophet Micah says in the OT scroll that bears his name... we must locate him on the historical “time line” of Israel.

Hebrew-Judeo-Christian-Islamic Western Epochs

- 1) Ancient Myths: i.e., Adam and Eve, Methusaleh, Noah and The Tower of Babel
- 2) Abrahamic Legends: ca 2000 BCE
- 3) Moses, the Legendary Messiah: ca 1500 BCE
- 4) Davidic Kingdom: ca 1000 BCE
(900-250 BCE: Era of OT Prophecy)
- 5) Post-Exilic Reconstruction: ca 500 BCE
- 6) Christian Origins: 1st Century CE
- 7) The Holy Roman Empire: begins 6th Century CE
(foments 7th cy BCE Islamic Reaction)
- 8) The Dark Ages: Begins ca 1000 CE
- 9) Protestant Reformation: Begins ca 1500 CE
- 10) Post-Christendom: We are in it now!

*Micah
prophesying
in the local
marketplace.*



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The prophetic writings that we find in the OT
can be dated from after 900 to about 250 BCE.
Micah is located in the last ½ of the 8th cy BCE.

The invasion of the Northern Kingdom
by the Assyrians, its defeat in 721 BCE,
occupation of the land, and deportation
of the aristocracy was witnessed by him;

and he saw the events that led up to that
emerging in the Southern Kingdom also.

But it was witnessed from the perspective
of a tribal official in a subsistence farming
community a day's walk west of Jerusalem.

He wasn't part of the aristocratic "in crowd"
nor was he one of the sycophantic prophets,
toadies to however Royal wind was blowing.

He had seen how the Kings (and their Courts)
had mishandled, not only international affairs,
but also internal affairs, ignoring the Peasants,
instead of doing justice, building relationships,
and walking in the ways set out in Yahweh's law.

And Micah was calling them to account!

(PP: picture of Micah preaching)

Man, oh man, why should I have to tell you this?
You know what's right! Do justice, love loyalty,
and walk humbly with Yahweh... with your God.

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Things were changing in the world
surrounding the eastern end of the
Mediterranean. Traders from Egypt
- Assyria, Lybia - Babylon and points
east need access to Sea ports and
land routes via the traditional lands
of Israelite and Judean farmers.

At least, they believed Yahweh had deeded it to them
by Divine Decree. Had not Moses & Joshua said so?

King David finally quashes all foreign threats
and subsequent rulers, starting with Solomon,
will defend their rights and maintain traditions,
humbly walking in step with Yahweh's decrees.

But God's will for them is put on the back-burner as
Solomon builds a lavish court, a magnificent temple,
and forgets all about, "Walking humbly with Yahweh."

So much so, that when he dies, within days,
the kingdom splits between north and south,
United we stand; divided we fall! and they fell:
the North in 721BCE, and the South in 587BCE.

While the prophets - for the most part - preached
that the disaster was God's punishment on them
for being disobedient - I'm more inclined to think
it was naval gazing and internal power struggles
that kept them from noticing the changing world.

And Micah, the Billy Graham of his day,
did not hesitate to call them to account.



Man, oh man, why do I have to tell you this? You know what is right!

Do justice, love loyalty, and walk humbly with Yahweh... your God.

So what might that mean for us today, here in Kingston? like Micah's Moresheth... just a day's walk from Ottawa.

What does it mean when we demand justice?

What's justice in Kingston in January of 2017?

I guess - in a way - it depends on who you ask.

On January 8, I heard Dr. David Gordon speak about reimagining the streetscapes of downtown Kingston; he started his presentation with the following caveat:

"It is my intention to lay before you the plan, as a concept uncluttered by personal biases."

Then David shared how his feelings around the closure of KCVI resulted in his becoming involved far beyond reason, beyond what he could justify.

And last Sunday Mary asked me about gay marriage,

"If Scripture passages and Church tradition clearly condemn it, how can a Church now, in the 21st century, be publicly supporting it?"

We talked a while, but this was my bottom line:

"We know more about human biology, sexuality & personality than they did."

For people who can still remember the "hey-day" of the local textile industries in the middle of the last century, loss of business to Foreign competition seemed unjust.

"What about loyalty to Canadian suppliers, eh?"

And what about our teens stuck in school buildings that should have been condemned over 20 years ago; and what about 12 years of federal government ready to hand out billions in corporate tax breaks instead of increasing support for revamping of local education?

With KCVI, Kingston parents came in droves to tell the School Board they wanted a made in Kingston solution for their children's education... without hours on buses.

Will such voices be heard? Is the bottom line driven by \$ alone, or will thousands of people-hours on buses be part of the justice equation?

Let alone... how bussing limits participation in extracurricular activities for many of the teens.

Micah's second suggestion, of which he is also certain those whom he addresses are already aware, is loyalty.

In some translations, we see *"to love kindness."* I think Micah reminds us, *"to be compassionate."*

This reminder - like the first about justice - is political, how people relate to each other.

As was Jesus speech - read from Matthew's Gospel this morning - a "Political Manifesto."

To walk humbly with God, Micah is saying,
you first need to get right with one another.

While Religious Rituals may be important
as the visual enactment of Spiritual Truths,
on their own they don't accomplish a thing.

And... if seen as a substitute for justice and
compassion, they do more harm than good.
This is the Bottom Line for Micah and for us.

While this is an over-simplification, I see ethics as
being approachable from one of two perspectives:

- 1) What some philosophers call, "Deontology," a system of right and wrong based on a set of rules - like the Ten Commandments. Follow 'em, you're doin' what's right.
- 2) Or what others call, "Ontology," where virtue, or rightness is one's perceptual ability, perception understood as holistic comportment to and engagement in and with the world. Right & Wrong can't be found in rule books, but in genuinely relating to the world: its people, places and things around us, which world is evolving... hence determination of justice and compassion evolves with it.

To walk humbly with God, then, becomes letting go
of our cockiness about being saved, right believing,
and having access to "absolute" truth or knowledge,

...then gently reaching out to participate in a world
of which I am but a small part, in which there are
many other participants, all of whom, all of which,
play a part in determining what I am and what I do.

Circle of Life - We're All Connected



Does that mean there are no longer any rules?
Of course not. But rules are not the bottom line.
Life and interaction with all that lives in ways that
are life-giving, that is the bottom line. That is God.

Engaging in such endeavours, supported
by our weekly gatherings that celebrate it,
is what can make "church" relevant in 2017.

Perhaps, as you reflect on the possibilities
for Sydenham St. UC and The Spire project
as you prepare for Feb 5th's congregational
meeting, you might ponder how effective you
have been at doing it, asking, what else needs
to be considered in coming years to get better
at being an increasingly, relevant organisation?

AMEN