

Little Isaiah (Week 5) - Rebuke, Repent, Restored, Repeat (Micah 7)

Yesterday's Sermon Summary

1. What has our series through Micah been like for you? One hopes that it affected as [2nd Timothy 3.16-17](#) says "all scripture" should (which is referring to the Old Testament; there was no New Testament yet): you have felt "corrected," "reproved or challenged," and "trained about righteousness (which means justice and goodness)."

2. In the last week of our series through Micah, we wanted to highlight a fundamental spiritual pattern that you observed in Micah 7, in all of Micah, in other prophetic literature, and across the Old Testament in general that has been labeled "the cycle of redemption." It marks Israel at every point in its history - Exodus, conquest, judges, kings, and post-Exile (see [Psalm 78](#) and [105-106](#)) - and it shows up in the lives of famous O.T. figures like Abraham, Moses, David, and Elijah.

3. Biblical scholar Stephen Um describes the cycle of redemption as these four successive phases: rebuke, repentance, restoration, repeat. Esteemed O.T. scholar Walter Brueggemann in his book on the subject summarizes the sequence this way: face reality, grieve, hope, repeat. As this was Israel's experience of God's salvation and transformation, we can expect it to be ours - you, me, our church as a community of faith, and even our country.

4. This perceived cycle in the Old Testament is exceedingly insightful and helpful on a number of counts. First, it tells us that redemption for us often begins with divine rebuke, with being shaken awake in our denial, and with facing our uncomfortable reality. In so many words, each of us will experience God's redemption in our own lives, in our church, or even in our culture to the degree that we are willing to be confronted and convicted by God.

5. Part of why redemption often begins with a rebuke or reproof is that human beings - all of us - are experts at denial. As Thomas Merton put it, "We are not very good at recognizing illusions, least of all the ones we cherish about ourselves." We tend to be in the most denial about those things in or around us that make feel anxious, overwhelmed, incompetent, angry, etc.

6. This opening rebuke of the pattern of redemption is not motivated by God's anger primarily, but God's love: as C.S. Lewis wrote in Mere Christianity, "God loves us far too much to leave us as we are." So God wants what's best for us more than we want what's best for us. We often experience God's love most when God challenges, confronts, and disrupts us.

7. A second profound insight offered by the Old Testament's pattern of redemption is that grief often precedes hope, that is, grief is often the necessary precursor to hope. As Brueggemann observe, after our denial is broken, what often comes next - and what must come next - is despair, despair over how we been unfaithful to God, insensitive to others, and/or demeaning to neighbors who are every bit as much God's beloved children as we are.

November 16,
2025

Little Isaiah

REPENT



Rebuke, Repent, Restored, Repeat
(Micah 7)

8. So why grief before hope? According to pastor Jose Humphreys III writing for Sojourners, grief does at least two things: a) it enlarges our heart, that is, the more willing we are to get real and feel the depth and breadth of grief, the more we will be able to experience the depth and breadth of grace and hope when they assuredly come, and b) the deeper our grief, the more it motivates to not repeat what's caused the grief and the more we want to chart a different, better course in the future.

9. Grief before hope is necessary at the church, community, and national scale too. Prior to the sermon, Pastor Chris ran the nuts and bolts of the cycle of redemption past a colleague who is a trained social worker. Here was her reply about the need for societal grief: "Obviously, the Hebrews knew how to grieve better than us in our day and age. Does our lack of grieving cause us to be unable to move forward?...I know in a general sense that when a death occurs in a family, the amount of resilience that enters the system is directly tied to the amount of grieving they do. In other words, if they don't grieve, they don't bounce back. Period. I'm wondering if our society is stunted by its lack of contrition and grief over our past and present sins."

10. A third and final insight from the cycle of redemption is really good news - hope is grounded in God, not us. As the apostle Paul puts, God is the God of hope (Romans 15.13). This is why Micah ends with a paragraph declaring that there is no one like our God, and our worst is no match for God's best, God's forgiveness, and God's love ([7.18-20](#)). Father Richard Rohr reminds us that "Our remembering that God will always remember us is our highway into the future."

More on Prophets - Hearing Them, Being Challenged by Them, and Being Them

Though we're leaving Micah behind, all of these resources below will help you keep appreciating and being challenged by the prophets, as well as learning how to be one in our day and time:

- If you want to read a book on the prophets, here are three pretty readable options:
 - [From Judgment to Hope: A Study on the Prophets: Brueggemann, Walter](#)
 - [Reality, Grief, Hope: Three Urgent Prophetic Tasks: Brueggemann, Walter](#)
 - [The Tears of Things: Prophetic Wisdom for an Age of Outrage: Rohr, Richard](#)
- Spend a week reading through some meditations on the prophetic ministry of Jesus: [The Prophetic Work of Jesus: Weekly Summary](#)
- Here are some daily devotionals on Old Testament prophets:
 - [Non-Profit Prophets](#)
 - [Telling the Truth](#)
 - [Prophet](#)
 - [Talking Points](#)
- Four keys to prophetic witness as seen in the ministry of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.: [A Great Prophet of God](#)
- What does it mean to be a prophet today? (A conversation with Walter Brueggemann): [What Does It Mean To Be Prophetic Today?](#)
- Here's a piece from Sojourners on "prophetic resistance": [Prophetic Resistance](#)