



The G.E.M.

Volume 5 Edition 6

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WALK IN HOPE

What is it that gets you up in the morning? What is it that gives you the motivation to face life's challenges and to step out in boldness? For those who have a relationship with God it is simply hope. Hope in an everlasting, almighty, sovereign God who knows what is best for us.

This mid-winter as you climb out of your warm bed with its blanket calling you back to bed, think about who God is and His place in your life. As you go into the bathroom in below zero temperatures and look in the mirror at your reflection, think about how good God has been to you in giving you life and a roof over your head. Then as the first cup of coffee kicks in ask Him to give you the hope and strength to face the day.

This month we look at who God is by looking at one of His most important attributes in our main article on page 3, His immutability. We also see how God dealt with the sinful nation of Judah through the prophet Micah in *Bible Basics* and the monthly cross-word. In *Lesser Known Heroes of the Bible* we see the amazing faith of Caleb who placed his hope in God when he was sent out by Moses to spy out the land of Canaan. Finally, we learn the next step in *Bible Study 101*.

There too are some exciting changes ahead for us at Grace Media, so please keep checking your inbox for more information in the coming weeks.

Remember, keep your eyes on the Lord for in Him you will find true hope.

Enjoy this edition of *The G.E.M.*

Blessings,

Glyn and Linda. †

"But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory, both now and to the day of eternity. Amen." (2 Peter 3:18)

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BIBLE BASICS

Micah

The Book of Visions

Micah was a prophet in the southern kingdom of Judah at the same time as Isaiah and Hosea. Micah's visions deal with both kingdoms and their judgement, followed by days of holiness and blessing.

Author & Date: Micah is traditionally recognised as the writer of the book and goes to great lengths to identify the time in which he was active. In 1:1 we read that his visions occurred during the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah.

Given this information, the events in the book can therefore be determined to have occurred between 742 and 687 BC.

Structure: The has generally been accepted that the book of Micah develops three main themes which are reflected in its outline.

It is interesting to note that each section begins with the phrase "Hear ye," and ends with a promise.

	<u>Chapters</u>
Punishment Promised	1-2
Coming Kingdom	3-5
From Sin to Salvation	6-7

Micah and Jesus: There are three passages in the book of Micah that refer to Jesus:

- 2:12-13 refers to Jesus as king,
- 4:1,7 refers to Jesus' righteous reign over the whole earth, and
- 5:2 refers to His birthplace, Bethlehem.

Micah is also referred to twice in the New Testament:

- Mathew 2:5-6 by the Magi who went to see Herod, and
- Matthew 10:35-36 by Jesus when He sent out the twelve disciples.

Did you Know? The elders of Judah quoted Micah 3:12 in Jeremiah 26:18.

The Northern Kingdom, Israel, was taken into captivity during Micah's lifetime because they did not heed the warnings of the prophets.

Value for Today: The Bible is full of commands and guidelines of how we should be behaving, but the book of Micah sums this up for us in one verse, "to do justice, love mercy, and to walk humbly" with God (6:8). This refers to our living a life being moral, considerate of others and to be in a personal relationship with God as our Lord.

God wants us to live lives where Christ is exhibited in all our conduct. In our homes, businesses, churches, and even at the mall. If we apply this verse to our lives and follow it, we will live lives that are a true testimony to Christ. †

BIBLE STUDY 101

STEP 7: Cross-Referencing

After asking all the questions and recording them, the next task is to interpret the text. Interpretation is the process of determining the meaning of a text.

Despite what you may have heard to the contrary, this is not a difficult thing to do, as long as you follow one simple rule, allow the Bible to interpret itself. By doing this you will not be giving it an interpretation that you want it to have, or that you are comfortable with, but you are allowing the true meaning of the text that is revealed by God Himself.

The first step of this process is cross-referencing. This is where you follow a topic of a word from one verse to another within the Bible in order to find out all that the Bible has to say about it. Many Bibles contain cross-references in a middle column, but one good resource is the Thompson's Chain Reference Bible.

Follow the References

To begin, use the references in your Bible to follow a particular topic of word in the Bible. For example, follow the references for Nicodemus in John 3 to find out more about him. These references are not always exhaustive, so you may want to refer to a good concordance to find more references to look up.

If you are unsure of the meaning of a word, begin by following the references of a word to other books by the same author. Understanding how he used the word in other places helps to determine how it is used in your current text. If you are still unsure, then refer to a Bible dictionary or to the *Strong's Concordance* for more clarity.

Record the References

As you follow the cross-references you need to record them, and to do this you need another chart, the Cross-Reference Chart.

This chart consists of only two columns. In the first column on the left, you begin by noting the word or topic that you are following. Under that word you record the references to the other verses dealing with that word or topic.

In the second column, you make important notes concerning that particular verse. Then move on the next reference verse and note the important information regarding that verse. It is a good idea to keep your verses in correct Bible book, chapter, and verse order, so you may end up rewriting this table a few times. It is easier and less time consuming to draft this table on a computer as it allows you to keep your references in order.

Apart from using the references indicated in the text you are initially studying, do not be afraid to follow further references that are indicated in the referred to verses. This will help you to get a better picture of the meaning of the text at a later stage, but do not allow yourself to chase too many rabbits.

A sample chart using the word "Ruler" in John 3:1, as well as a blank chart for your own use, is available for download from our website at:

www.gracemedia.co.za/downloads/bs101d.pdf †

LESSER KNOWN HEROES OF THE BIBLE

CALEB

In 1439BC, when Moses sent out scouts to explore Canaan, one of the twelve men selected was Caleb. Caleb [KAY-leb; "rabid"], like Joshua, came back with a glowing report of the riches of the land and with total enthusiasm for going up and taking it. When the people refused to move forward, frightened by the other scouts' report of the enemy's strength, Caleb was one of just four men who urged trusting and obeying the Lord. Caleb and Joshua were the only adults of the Exodus generation left alive when the Israelites finally did enter Canaan some forty years later.

But Caleb was not one to rest on his laurels. Although an old man, he was in the forefront of the fighting. When the power of the enemy was broken, Caleb asked for land that was still occupied by Canaanites! Not surprisingly, Caleb soon drove them out and occupied his land (Josh. 15).

Caleb kept his eyes on the Lord when nearly everyone around him refused to trust. Caleb sought and accepted personal responsibility. He was not one to sit back and let others do the job that needed doing. Nor was he one to look for an easy way out.

Caleb lacks the fame of Moses or Joshua, but Caleb and men like him made the conquest of Canaan possible. It's the same in the church today. Many men and women of character and quality live their entire lives in the background. People outside their own congregation do not know their names, but the qualities that bring others fame are qualities the Calebs among us possess in just as great a degree. In the end, our Calebs are as important as the more famous in carrying on God's work.

Next Month: Enoch

Quoted from Richards, L. (1999). *Every man in the Bible* (Page 145). Nashville: T. Nelson. †

CUT OUT & COLLECT

JEREMIAH

24

Key Idea: Judah's Exile & Return

Summary: Prophecy that Judah would return to Jerusalem after 70 years in exile.

Key People: Jeremiah, Josiah, Zedekiah, Nebuchadnezzar.

Key Places: Jerusalem.

Strange but True: Idols described to be like a scarecrow in a cucumber field (10:5)

God commanding a man not to marry or have children as an example to the nation (16:2).

A king who cut up and burned God's Word as it was read to him (36:23).

A book tied to a stone and thrown into a river (51:69-64).

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GOD IS THE SAME

“Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow.” (James 1:17)

“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.” (Hebrews 13:8)

“But You are the same, and Your years will not come to an end.” (Psalm 102:7)

The above verses illustrate what I believe is one of the most comforting attributes of God, His immutability – the technical word for His “unchangeableness.”

It is a theological truth that we all generally accept, and to some degree understand, but never really live as though it were the case. Think about it, in the past God saw you through a difficult time in your life, but then suddenly something happens and it seems as though God is no longer there. You question Him as to why He has not helped you or provided for you in some way like He did in the past. You think that maybe you have sinned to such an extent that He is no longer looking out for you. This in effect is making God out to be someone who changes to how we are.

But this is not the God that is presented to us in the Bible. He never changes, and He will certainly never change according to us.

An important Question

If God is always the same, one question must be answered immediately, what is God like? There are many words that we could use to describe God, that is a whole study by itself, so I am not going to go into all of them. Some of the more commonly referred to characteristics are that God is love (1 John 4:8), He is holy (Leviticus 11:34), He is merciful and gracious (seen in the cross and in other events), and that He is just (seen in His acts of judgement).

All of these character traits of God are evident throughout the Bible, though He may have applied them differently in different situations. For example, He never stopped being loving while He was judging the nation of Israel by sending them into captivity in Babylon.

How we See God

All too often we tend to focus only on one attribute of God and ignore the others. I remember when growing up the focus was so much on God being a judge that His love and mercy were more often than not, ignored, except maybe at Christmas or Easter. It seemed as though God was sitting in Heaven marking down every good or bad thing that we did.

Now it seems to be the other way round. The focus now is so much on God being loving that His holiness and justice are ignored. This has resulted in many people ignoring some very important commands in the Bible and has allowed many liberal thoughts to enter the church.

For example, if one sees God as being a demanding, angry, and impossible-to-please

policeman, one will begin to live in a way that reflects this. This could appear as an obsession for perfectionism or legalism. On the other hand, if one sees God as being a distant being who set everything in motion and then stepped back, one will display a lifestyle where God is not part of one's life and will have little or no time for Him.

But this is not what the God of the Bible is like. What is revealed of Him in the Bible far transcends any human concepts we can have of Him. To focus only on one of these attributes is limiting God, making Him to be someone we are comfortable with, and is in essence, idolatry. But instead, He is all of them and more.

Modern Thinking

Some teachers today say that God's involvement and interaction in our lives is based on us. That He responds to how we behave, speak and think. That in order for Him to act in a way that we would like Him to, we first have to do A, B, and C.

To limit God in such a way is to deny the character of God. It implies that we call the shots and that even though He is one way towards me today, He may not be that way tomorrow.

In order to look at the correct way of thinking about this and how it can give us hope, let us just take one attribute of God, love, and see how it plays out. Even though I am only using love here, you can just as easily exchange it for any of the other characteristics of God mentioned earlier.

God is Love

If God's interaction with man is dependant on us, then what would happen if God loves me today because I am kind and gentle, how will He be towards me tomorrow should I end up in a fight with my wife. The God who was “turned on” by my good nature is suddenly “turned off” by my bad attitude later. If this is how God is, then He is just as fickle as I am. He is no different to me and His emotions are unpredictable and just as undependable as mine.

1 John 4:8 tells us that “*God is love.*” He does not just have love, but rather it is part of who He is. There is nothing I can do to change God's love towards me. I cannot pray enough, repent enough, tell enough people about Jesus, or read the Bible enough to make God love me more. How can I do anything to make God's perfect love any more perfect? Perfection cannot be perfected.

In the same vain, what can I do to make God love me less? I cannot sin enough, hate enough or even deny God enough to make perfect love less perfect. Perfection cannot be reduced.

Not only is God's love perfect, it is also constant. We are never in the back of His mind somewhere like a distant memory, nor are we ever forgotten, and He is never ever too busy for us. We are all, at all times, in the forefront of His mind. The same God who spoke the world into existence, is focussing the same amount of

time and energy on us.

And if that is not enough, think about this, if you can, God's love is also complete. God does not have enough love for the human race, in the sense that He has enough love for all of us to receive a portion each that is sufficient for us. We do not just receive a crumb of love from His table, but rather we receive all of His love.

God does not just have enough love to go around, but rather that each one of us at all times, is the sole object of His affection. He loves each of us with all He is because He can never be a partial God.

An Important Truth to Grasp

As I mentioned earlier, this example of love can be applied to any of God's attributes. He is gracious, merciful, holy, just, etc, all the time, completely, equally, perfectly.

If we could only understand this important truth, that God never changes in His character no matter what we do or who we are, it would radically change how we see God and the world.

It would free us up from trying to live a life of perfection by obeying the rules out of fear of a God who will strike us down at the drop of a hat. But it would also cause us to want to obey Him because while he is gracious, He is at the same time just.

It would also encourage us to completely trust Him. When life's challenges face us, we will feel confident enough to place all of our needs in His hands and then to walk away and leave them with Him. We will not want to do things our way because they are in the safe hands of a God who loves us and provides for us continually.

The immutability of God is a tough doctrine to understand, and I do not believe we ever will fully. However, we can rest in the comfort that God is the same yesterday, today and tomorrow, and nothing that we will ever do, think, say, or believe, will ever change that.

The God who created the world will be with you and caring for you, till the end of time and beyond, simply because it who He is. †

God is the same yesterday, today and tomorrow!

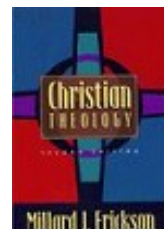
We tend to focus only on one attribute of God and ignore the others

LEARN MORE ABOUT GOD

Christian Theology by Millard J. Erickson

Written from a conservative, evangelical, Baptist perspective, *Christian Theology* is a technical/semi-technical work, designed for use in seminaries. However it is appropriate for educated lay-readers as well. Scriptural quotations are generally from the NIV, though it does refer to the original languages.

It offers incredible detail with meticulous analysis of the major issues in theology. This is a valuable tool for pastors, students and church leaders.



R 470

THE BACK PAGE

BIBLE TRIVIA CHALLENGE

Complete the verses below from the book of Micah. All verses are from the NIV.

ACROSS

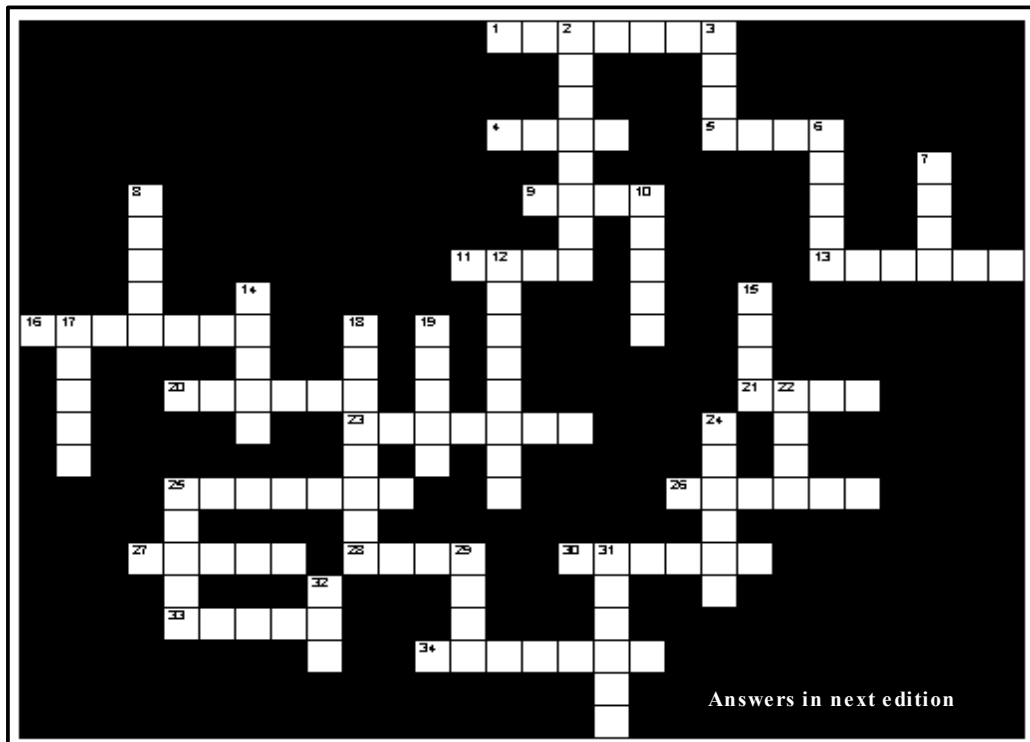
- 1 "The ___ of Jacob will be among the nations" (5:8)
- 4 "Every man will sit under his own ___" (4:4)
- 5 "Both hands are skilled in doing ___" (7:3)
- 9 "I will make the ___ a remnant" (4:7)
- 11 "___ will be plowed like a field" (3:12)
- 13 "Rise and ___, O Daughter of Zion" (4:13)
- 16 "They will rule the land of ___ with the sword" (5:6)
- 20 "Lately my ___ have risen up like an enemy" (2:8)
- 21 "I will ___ them my wonders" (7:15)
- 23 "You who live in ___, harness the team to the chariot" (1:13)
- 25 "Therefore I will make ___ a heap of rubble" (1:6)
- 26 "Do not trust a neighbor; put no confidence in a ___" (7:5)
- 27 "The ___ will be ashamed" (3:7)
- 28 "Tell it not in ___; weep not at all" (1:10)
- 30 "Therefore ___ will be abandoned" (5:3)
- 33 "But as for me, I am filled with ___" (3:8)
- 34 "Hear this, you ___ of the house of Jacob" (3:9)

DOWN

- 2 "Come, let us go up to the ___ of the LORD" (4:2)
- 3 "You will be ___ to Jacob" (7:20)
- 6 "Though I sit in darkness, the LORD will be my ___" (7:8)
- 7 "To act justly and to ___ mercy" (6:8)
- 8 "You do not stay ___ forever" (7:18)
- 10 "I brought you up out of ___" (6:4)
- 12 "Woe to those who plan ___" (2:1)
- 14 "Listen, you leaders of ___" (3:1)
- 15 "you will tread our ___ underfoot" (7:19)
- 17 "Shepherd your people with your ___" (7:14)
- 18 "Look! The LORD is coming from His ___ place" (1:3)
- 19 "her priests teach for a ___" (3:11)
- 22 "But as for me, I watch in ___ for the LORD" (7:7)
- 24 "I will destroy your ___ images" (5:13)
- 25 "I will bring them together like ___ in a pen" (2:12)
- 29 "At that time He will ___ His face from them because of the evil they have done" (3:4)
- 31 "They will beat their ___ into plowshares" (4:3)
- 32 "Why do you now ___ aloud - have you no king?" (4:9)

COLOUR ME IN

Shepherd Your people with Your scepter, the flock of Your possession. Micah 7:14



Answers in next edition

Obadiah 10; Fish 11; Jesus 12; Amiah 15; Dust 20; Sept 22; Angry 25; Kings 26; Lord 19; Tarsish 21; Death 23; Temple 24; Prayed 26; Lots 27; God Down: 1; Cargo 2; Fast 3; Worm 5; Grave 7; Three 9.

Last Month's Answers

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