

I will **summarize** for you, in case you missed it, the words of **Micah** chapter 6 that I just finished reading: ‘*God always keeps God's end of the bargain.*’

This Scripture is a portion of a **trial**, a **legal proceeding**. It is an **inner conversation**, a **musing** within God's self, where **God puts Himself on trial** in the cosmic courtroom.

The one who **overheard** this scenario was a **prophet** who lived in the **8th Century** before Christ named **Micah**. A **sensitive**, **God-fearing** man who was **capable of listening to God holding court on God's own self**. He was probably a **simple farmer** from a **village** some bit from **Jerusalem**.

It was during **a war that was going badly**. The war had been raging for some time. The war was against **Assyria**, which today is **Iran and Iraq**. Things were not looking good. The **Northern Kingdom of Israel** was crumbling. The **government was in chaos**. **Five assassinations** in a short period of time, one right after the other. They had hardly finished **swearing one king into office** before he was killed. A few people were **making a lot of money off the war**, most of the people **were giving their sons up to death**. Assyria had its foot on Israel's neck, with a lifted sword. It's about over for Israel.

The Southern Kingdom of Judah was fairing only a little better. They had **bought some time from the Assyrians** by paying **tribute**. The **Jewish politicians strapped the weight of the tribute to the backs of the farmers and villagers**, while they themselves **splurged** – threw themselves some **parties**, turned religion into a **business**. They got **rich while people starved**. While the **powerful took the money from the people who had the least of it**, those same power brokers **plotted to send the least of the people into a suicide battle against the Assyrians**.

And God said,

“I didn't want it to end this way. This is not what I had in mind.

“I remember when I first called my people, I loved them, I held them in my arms and we walked along together. Now Israel, my beloved Israel, has **accused me of being cold-hearted, unfair and unjust**. But I am not the one who broke the **covenant**.

“We are going to **court**.

“The **judge and the jury** will be the **mountains** and the hills, because they were there. They heard every word, they know every promise, they saw what happened in the valleys and on the high places – they will judge between Israel and me.”

“Well God,” the **Mountains** said, “Israel has **no case!** You've got all the evidence on your side. You tell Israel to do one thing and they go and do another. They have **no defense!** You could put them in prison and throw away the key, if you'd only do it!”

“I know, I know. I would **be within my rights to press charges** here and now.”

The **mountains** said, “God, Israel has been complaining that you are **cruel, and mean-spirited.** If they want **justice**, why don't you show them a little **justice**. You've seen them. The first chance they get they leave you and **start chasing other gods.** And you should see what they do at your temple. They have this **contraption** that always gives people a bad **exchange rate.** A person could get **better prices at a movie theater.**

“Instead of looking out for the **handicapped** people they take advantage of them.

“Instead of helping the **poor** they take every last cent. How about a little justice for once, God? Why don't you **prosecute** them to the fullest extent of the law and be done with the whole smelly business.”

“I dunno.” **God** said, “I've been with them for such a long time. I never imagined things would be where they are today. It all started so well. I remember when I bent down on a riverbank and scooped up a handful of clay. I caressed that clay, I shaped it. Out of the clay I formed **eyes** to see the **roses and tulips, and to look at the sky.** I gave it **hands** that it could use **to build things, it could reach out and help, it could hug and hold.** And I **bent over and breathed in its nostrils**, and air filled its lungs and that lump of clay became a **man**.

“I remember how much **joy** I had just **walking through the garden** with him, I said, 'it is very good.'

“But it wasn't long before my precious people used those **beautiful eyes to envy and hate**, and with those **wonderful hands they hit and killed.** Right from the very beginning.

“**Adam and Eve** stole the fruit, **Cain killed Abel** – right from the very beginning humans were trouble.

“And now **here we are in court** – the mountains there, Israel over there – I'd be within my rights to do away with these **humans**.”

“**God, you've got a point.** Right from the very beginning you gave Israel every chance in the world and what did they do but **spit in your face**. You told **Adam and Eve** that if they ate the fruit they would **die**. Well, they ate the fruit. And what do you do? When Adam and Eve stole that fruit, you should have kicked them out and slammed the door shut. But you softened up. You **made them some clothes** to cover them and keep them warm.

“If you want **a stray cat to go away** you don't keep **putting out food**, you **chase it away** and **close the door** and that is that.

“And **Cain** – what do you do for **Cain**? Even after he **murdered his brother**, sure, you sent him away, but you sent him away with a **mark** on his forehead because he was scared. Cain said, '*I'll be killed*' and you took pity on him, even after what he'd done. He didn't give that same courtesy to his own brother, but you protected him from people who had every right to do to him what he did to Abel. '*An eye for an eye*' – you said it yourself. When you shut the door, you must shut the door hard and let these people **suffer the consequences for their actions.**”

“Ok, ok, ok, but **Israel and I have such a wonderful history**. We've been together so long. We had a **covenant!** You've got to admit that we had a **covenant.**”

Then the **Mountains** said, “A covenant doesn't work if only one side keeps their end of the deal. We were there when you were so angry with the people. You said you were fed up and you were going to wipe the slate clean and you let loose the **floodwaters** – but then You saw Your friend **Noah** and his boys and their wives, and you made a **little ark**. See what I mean God? You keep softening up. You even made a **promise** to Noah on **Mount Ararat** that you would not destroy the world with a flood – even though the people of the world be nothing but **trouble and stink**.

“We were there on **Mount Sinai** when you promised to be Israel's God, when Israel and You signed the covenant.

“*Do you solemnly swear to take the Lord as your God and Israel as your people?* God said, '*I do*' and Israel said '*I do.*' You gave them the **laws** and for a time Israel treated them with delight.

'You shall have no other gods before the Lord God.'

'Amen.'

'You shall not steal.'

'Amen.'

'Not lie.'

'Amen.'

'Not covet what your neighbor has.'

'Amen. That's right, that's what we'll do.'

'Remember the Sabbath to keep it holy.'

'Yes.'

“You had a covenant! But Israel's **singing a different tune now.**

You've done what you said you were going to do, God. You kept your promises. **When are you going to have enough of it?** Israel has wandered away from you, and then he blames you when he gets into trouble. Why don't you **let Israel alone**, they got into this mess with the Assyrians, let things take their own course. **You need to get out of the people business, people will just break Your heart.**”

“I remember,” said **God**, “when Israel was in **Egypt**. The son of a slave. He cried out for help. He cried out for help and I answered him. I sent him **Moses**, and **Aaron**, and **Miriam**. I did some **powerful things in Egypt**, some powerful things. I lifted the **rod of violence off of Israel's back** and that's when we both signed on the dotted line that I would be Israel's God, and Israel would be my people. And Israel said to me, **two of your laws are above all others**. To love you, O **God**, with **heart, soul, and strength**. And to **love my neighbor** as myself.

“Those were great days.”

“God, you can't live on the thin diet of ancient memories. You remember what happened in the desert.”

“Well, we had some rough times in the desert. We barely got anywhere and Israel said he wanted to go back, *'did God bring me all the way out here to starve to death? Let's go back to Egypt.'* But we made it through that.”

“What about the time the **king of Moab** wanted to ambush Israel in the desert and they wanted You to help. You could have been rid of Israel right then, if you'd had the mind to.”

“The king of Moab asked a prophet named **Balaam** to curse Israel, and he was about to do it, he was on his way to do the job. But I stopped him. This was **pure genius**, I made his **donkey** talk to him. Every time old Balaam would take the switch to his donkey to go curse Israel I had an angel block the path and the donkey refused to go. **Balaam kept whipping the donkey**, and the donkey wouldn't budge and then the donkey turned to Balaam and said, *'why are you hitting me? God is stopping you, it's not just me.'*”

“See God, that's just what I mean. **You have kept your end of the bargain**, and then you keep making **allowances**. There's nothing more you need to do. You're **always bailing Israel out**. If Israel is not **grateful** for the covenant, for bringing them out of Egypt and across the Jordan River, that's not your fault. **If you won't force them to be a loving people, then**

why don't you get rid of them. Israel has already turned Israel's back on you. **Wake up! He's gone!"**

“But they are my children. We have a **covenant**.”

“Did Israel keep the covenant?”

“No.”

“**Stay away from people.** You have kept all your promises with Israel and **you can count on one hand the times that anybody said 'Thank you'.** **Face reality and move on.** There's still a lot of **enjoyment** out there. Why don't you spend some time thinking about some of your other **creatures?** You're always thinking about the humans, when was the last time you sat down and enjoyed a **bunny rabbit?** Or what about the puppies? You never **give any attention to the puppies.**

“There's a lot of enjoyment out there – but stay away from humans they are **nothing but heart-ache**. You know, You've made some funny creatures. You made the **duck**. I've always liked the **Ostrich**, that's the funniest critter - it's a bird, with wings and everything, but it can't fly, it runs everywhere it goes. You made an animal that's **neck is as long as its legs**, you called it a **Giraffe**. Why don't you spend some of your time on your other creatures? If you need some **excitement**, go **soar with the eagles** or **swim with the sharks** – but leave these people alone, there's nothing but grief there.”

And God turned to Israel,

“We had a **covenant**. I loved you, and guided you and gave you words to live by and taught you how to love, and you threw it all in my face for some **pathetic statues**, and a couple **measly bucks**.”

“God, what do you want from me?” **Israel said.** “You said build a **temple**, so I built a temple. You won't be happy with anything I do, will you?”

“**Sure, you built a temple.** And every **Sabbath** I am out front and I see the people coming. And **I'm so happy to see you all**, but you don't even look at me. You just walk on by. You've made my **temple a real profitable place for yourselves**. You're driving people away, and when I try to go in **an usher stops me at the door and says 'we don't need you anymore.'** I would rather you **loved me and threw away all your religion** then become a **bunch of crooks** like you've done.”

“What would you have me to do, God?”

“**My child, you already know what to do.** I whispered it in your ear when you were mere clay. I carved it in stone on Mt. Sinai. I spoke it to the prophets. I want you to be my **children**, be like me. When you see people **getting beat up, help them.** **Respect everyone and treat them**

with honesty and grace. And put me first in everything; be prayerful and reflective about walking with me. This is all I ever wanted.”

The mountains said,
“God you have won your case. You are the faithful partner, and Israel, time and time again, has been unfaithful.

“Aren't you the God who said, '*what you sew, that's what you'll reap.*' Why don't you **stick to your word. Stick to your ‘no’. Stick to your own regulations** and just say '*goodbye.*' Human beings are trouble and tears, you've done everything possible, they blew it - you are **released from your duty to the covenant.**”

And God said,
“I refuse to be released from the covenant.
I can't. I can't – I won't. I will not give up my end of the covenant, I **will not say goodbye.**”

“But...”
“I will not forget the covenant.”
“But...”
“No.
“I made a promise to **Abraham and Jacob.** And I will be **faithful to the end.** I will do anything.”

“You would be **faithful to these people**, even after they have **failed to keep their end of the bargain?**”

“I will be faithful to the end.”
“To the end?”

God said,
“I would even go to the **cross.”**
“You would go to the cross for these people.”

“I would go to the cross for all of them.”

Do you believe that?