

Exegetical X-ray of Justice in Micah 6:6-8: Implication for Indigenous Readers in Nigeria

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Abstract

There is the constant need to interpret the Bible in a way that makes it possible for every people and culture of the world to appreciate the principles and message of the scripture. The need is particularly pertinent because the Bible was originally written in Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek. The Hebrew Bible – the Old Testament presents many valuable principles and concepts which if properly interpreted, could result in reorientation in many spheres. For indigenous people in Nigeria, who are turning in large numbers to Christianity, a proper interpretation of Old Testament texts is key to full integration of the scripture into daily life conduct. The aim of this paper is to interpret the concept of justice in Micah 6:6-8 with a view to showing its relevance in the appreciation of justice among indigenous people in Nigeria. The work adopts the grammatical exegetical method of biblical hermeneutics. It finds that the call to do justice in Micah 6:6-8 is inalienably universal and inclusive, requiring all to pursue equity and fairness in daily conduct. It also finds that the idea of justice among Nigerians can positively be informed and reinforced by subscribing to the principles of justice in Micah 6:6-8. The paper submits in conclusion that the final products of a proper exegetical x-ray of Micah 6:6-8 are valid for rethinking justice in contemporary times.

Keywords: justice, exegesis, Micah 6:6-8, Old Testament, fairness

Introduction

There are different perceptions to מִשְׁפָּט (*mishpat*) “justice” in the Hebrew Bible. In Old Testament (OT) the term מִשְׁפָּט connotes: arbitration, legal decision, right, fairness, rendering to people what there are due, covenant faithfulness, Yahweh’s judgment or legal stipulations – law, among others (Ps. 36:6; Zp. 2:3; Is. 58:2; Dt. 16:18-19; Ez. 18:8; Is. 49:4; Ez. 39:22; Ex. 21:9; Is. 1:21 etc.). Micah 6:6-8 presents OT readers with perhaps one of the finest ideas of justice. It comes with מִשְׁפָּט not only as a requirement for unbroken relationship with God but also as a panacea for the woes of social injustices. It reads:

בְּמָה אֶעֱבֹד יְהוָה אֵפֶר לֵאלֹהֵי מָרוֹם הֲאֶעֱבֹד מֶנְעוּר בְּצוֹלֹת בְּצַגְלִים בְּנֵי שָׁנָה:
הֲיִרְצֶה יְהוָה בְּאַלְפֵי אֵילִים בְּרִבְבוֹת גִּבְעוֹת־שֶׁמֶן הֲאֶתֵּן בְּכוֹרֵי פִשְׁעֵי פְרִי בִטְנֵי חֲטָאתִים נִפְשֵׁי:
הֲגִיד לִי אֱלֹהִים מִה־טוֹב וּמִה־יְהוָה דּוֹרֵשׁ מִמֶּנּוּ כִּי אִם־עֲשׂוֹת מִשְׁפָּט וְאַהֲבַת חֶסֶד וְהִצַּגְעַ לְכַת
עִם־אֱלֹהֵיךָ:

(Ellinger and Rudolph, 2006).

With what shall I come before the LORD, and bow myself before God on high?
Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the
LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousands of rivers of oil?

Shall I give my first-born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?" He has showed you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God? (Revised Standard Version (RSV)).

The term *צדקה* as depicted in Micah 6:6-8 is often rendered as a prophetic call to Israel to adhere to the dictates of the covenant (Huffman, 1959; Brueggemann, 2010; Laney, 1981; Johnson, 2012; Steele 2013). In this sense, the term is taken from the premise of the somewhat legal suit that begins the chapter. However, *צדקה* – justice in this text could have a broader interpretive implication when exegetically x-rayed from its linguistic and philological nuances. In this sense, *צדקה* in Micah 6:6-8 could pass as universal call to social justice and fairness in general human conduct.

Micah 6:6-8 had been studied from different perspectives. Generally many Old Testament scholars have devoted large volumes of writings on the issue of social justice in Micah and the rest of the prophetic corpus (Malchow, 1996; Westfall and Dyer, 2016; Houston, 2020). However, there is still the need to continuously bridge the gap that exists between ancient Israel's application of the text and the understanding of justice in contemporary societies. For instance, the adaptation of the Hebrew Bible as a text of faith among indigenous people turning to Judaism and Christianity in this era, calls for a type of interpretation that pays attention to the universality and inclusivity of the OT. When such call is answered, it allows indigenous people to better interrogate their lives and environment from biblical positions.

Boloje (2017) already points out the need to constantly subject *צדקה* to multidimensional approaches in the attempt to unravel its various contextual perspectives. This study exegetically focuses on x-raying *צדקה* – justice in Micah 6:6-8 with the view to unravelling its interpretive relevance to the idea of universal and inclusive justice.

The Meaning and Types of Justice

It is important to paint a general picture of justice in this work. It could allow for a more robust appreciation of the coverage areas of *צדקה* in Micah 6:6-8. The fact that justice finds meaning within the ideas and moral capacity of individual, institution, and social cultural contexts makes it a difficult term to define. This difficulty is recognized in *Peace Terms* published by the United States Institute of Peace (2011) which defines justice within the framework of conflict management and peace building simply as "fair and equal treatment before the law;" and social justice as "a situation characterized by rule of law and fair distribution of resources and opportunities in the society" (p. 32).

It was Aristotle who considered justice as a particular virtue which is most necessary to a state of welfare. Accordingly, a just person is one who is lawful and fair, while an unjust person is one who is both unlawful and unfair. Aristotle specifically drew a line between what he called the universal justice which according to him is equal to virtue as a whole, and particular justice which has a narrower meaning (Igbafen and Aigbodioh, 2004; Duignan, 2021). Miller's (2021) summary of Aristotelian concept of justice is that, when justice is used in respect of complete virtue, it is always in relation to another person. Put differently, if justice is to be identified with morality as such, it must be morality in the sense of what we owe to one another.

Etymologically, the term justice is a mid-12th century English word that was used to express the “exercise of authority in vindication of right by assigning reward or punishment. It also implies the quality of being fair and just; moral soundness and conformity to truth” (<https://www.etymonline.com/word/justice> 2022). The word entered English via the old French *justice* especially from the 11th century usage connoting “justice, legal, and jurisdiction” (<<https://www.etymonline.com/word/justice>> 2022). Originally, the term justice is from the Latin word *iustitia* meaning “righteousness, equity;” and thought to be from the old Latin root *iustus* meaning “upright, just” (<<https://www.etymonline.com/word/justice>> 2022).

Miller (2021) subscribes to the definition of justice offered by the *Institute of Justinian*, as the constant and perpetual will to render to each his due. There are contrasts between conservative concept of justice and ideal justice. While conservative insist on maintaining existing norms and practices in society, the ideal justice demand reform of norms and practices in the face of ongoing experience and circumstances that may necessitate those changes (Miller, 2021).

For Mills (1991) the obligations of justice must fall within what could be enforced. There are perfect duties and imperfect duties. Duties of perfect obligation are those duties in virtue of which a correlative right resides in some person or persons while the latter concerns obligations that are left within the choice of the individual without constrain of time or sanctions if not performed, as in the case of charity or benevolence (Mills, 1991). For Rawls (1999) every individual possesses an inviolability based on justice that even the welfare of society as a whole cannot override. As a result, justice denies that the loss of freedom for some is made right by a greater good shared by others.

Horn (2014) asserts that justice is supposed to be important evaluative concept in everyday life as well as in other spheres According to him, if it is considered that one is just or fair, it must mean that such a person’s valuable feature has been identified. If we regard a given social institution as deeply unjust, we find ourselves in a state of outrage and strongly demand for a change. As these examples imply, we use the term justice and its cognates both for personal virtue and for the conditions of social institutions

Horns (2014) offers some vital clarifications on the types of justice, namely: Justice as equality in the distribution of goods and evils (distributive justice); justice as impartiality of the application of rules (impartial/procedural justice); justice as compensation of disadvantages and handicaps (corrective justice); justice as equivalence of criminal action and punishment (retributive justice); justice as equivalence of investments and results (connective justice); justice as adequate distribution of natural goods and evils (cosmic or natural justice); among others.

In more social context of the word and in relation to present usage, other critical distinctions are made as follows: political justice (within the context of civil rights and liberties); social and economic justice (bordering on sharing of goods and resources); gender justice (relating to male female and others); justice in respect to social minorities; international justice (For instance, racism, world poverty etc.); among others (Horns, 2014). Could an exegetical x-ray of Micah 6:6-8 strike a chord similar to the foregoing understanding of justice? The following sections will provide some critical insights to address this question.

Socio-political Setting of Micah 6:6-8

Relying on the authorial information in the book of Micah, it could be taken at face value that Micah's prophetic ministry falls between the reigns of Jotham (758–743 BC), Ahaz (733–727 BC), and Hezekiah (727–698 BC), kings of Judah. It is uncertain how far into Jotham's reign or how deep into Hezekiah's reign the start and the finish of his ministry should be located. Jotham's father, Uzziah, had led Judah to heights of prosperity unseen since the time of Solomon, as had his northern counterpart, Jeroboam II. However, the outward success was accompanied by spiritual weakness (Enns, 2013)

Waltke (2007) incisively captures the historical background to the book of Micah in a slightly different arrangement of the dates. According to him, it was during the reigns of Jotham (ca. 742-735 BCE), Ahaz (ca. 735-715 BCE), and Hezekiah, Micah sent his words of doom and hope to Samaria and Jerusalem, covering about 715-686 BCE. In Israel's history during the day of Micah, two unstable forces were at play: internal moral decay, and the expansion of the Neo-Assyrian Empire from beyond. Assyria had emerged a violent, arrogant state and was out to enslave its neighbors and subject them to humiliating tributary to enrich itself. The political and economic turbulence of the era was a result of the failure of Israel in their obligation to God (Waltke, 2007). As Waltke (2007) rightly notes, before Micah, Amos (c. 775-743 BCE) provided firsthand accounts of the moral decay that pervaded Samaria (cf. Amos 2:6-71, 4:6-9, 5:10-12, and 8:4-6). Again, the testimony of Hosea who lived between the generations of Amos and Micah (about 760–725 BCE), also shows that Samaria was still in the same terrible state of corruption and egregious injustice. As further observes, the pervasive socioeconomic inequities that existed in Samaria also existed in her prostitution sister, Jerusalem. As Hosea's successors, Micah and Isaiah revealed, rich landowners committed egregious atrocities against tenacious farmers, forcing them off their land and into a helpless, economically dependent state (Mic. 2:1-3, 8-9: 1-3, 9-10). This resulted to astonishing chasm between the rich and the poor. The relevant background Scriptures covering that period are 2 Kings 15:32-20:21; 2 Chron. 27-32; Isaiah 7; 36-39.

Micah verified Isaiah's ominous prophecies. He saw the Assyrian marching to Jerusalem while capturing captives from city after city (cf. Mic. 1:10-16). Micah went about naked and weeping, simulating the fate of the captives (cf. Mic. 1:8-9). Although Micah lived in a small town, he was familiar with the corruptions of city life in Israel and Judah. The content of the book reveals that Micah had a “deep sensitivity to the social ills of his day, especially as they affected the small towns and villages of his homeland. Because of Micah's condemnation of social injustice and religious apostasy, he has been dubbed the “Amos of the Southern Kingdom.” (Barker and Bailey, 1998).

Philological Notes on Micah 6:6-8

Micah 6:6 opens with a rhetorical question מָה־לְּיְהוָה אֶקְרָא לְאֱלֹהֵי מְרוֹם (bam-mah 'â-qad-dem Yah-weh 'ik-kaṣ lēlōhē mā-rō-wm). It is upon this and the rest of the questions in v. 6 and v. 7 the text terminating in verse 8 is anchored. מֵמַה is an interrogative preposition which properly mean “with what,” but actually “in what (בֵּ).” מָה /maw/ which is the root word is rendered “what,” “how,” “anything,” etcetera, elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible (e.g. Gen. 2:19; 4:10; 27:46; etcetera).

אָקדֶם (‘â-qad-dem) appears here as verb piel imperfect in 1st person common singular (v-piel-Imper 1cs). קָדֵם, alone is “I come.” It is fitting to accept RSV’s translation “shall I come before” as appropriate in the circumstance. יְהוָה is the Hebrew personal name for God. The tetragrammaton יהוה YHWH, a proper noun masculine singular, not sounded in Hebrew is unmistakably rendered “the LORD” in many English translations. The next word is אָבַרְךָ – (nifal, imperf, 1cs). אָבַרְךָ, originally means “I bow myself.” However, for readability, [and] is introduced in the final form “[and] bow myself.” The first question in verse 6 ends with two words. The first is a masculine plural common noun with the preposition לְ (le) and appearing in its final form as לְאֱלֹהֵי (lêlōhê) – “before God.” The last is מְרוֹם (marowm), a masculine singular noun meaning “on high.” (Ellinger and Rudolph, 2006).

The second part of the question in verse 6 starts with “shall I come before him” in the Hebrew, הָאֲקַדְמֶנּוּ (ha-’ă-qad-də-men-nū) with a 3rd person singular ending נוּ (nu – “him”). The suggested burnt offering is in a plural form as in “burnt offerings” – a noun in feminine plural צֹלוֹת with the preposition בְּ (בְּצֹלוֹת). Another masculine plural noun with a preposition follows in the Hebrew word בְּצַגְלִים (ba-’ă-gālim) translated “with calves.” בְּנֵי (bə-nê) and שָׁנָה (šā-nāh), the last two words of verse 6, actually presents in the form “old a year?” however, for readability, it comes to English in the form “a year old?”

Verse 7 like v. 6 above, also has two questions flowing in a continuous form from those in v. 6. However, the framing of these questions appear to be more complex. יִרְצָה (pleased) – is a qal imperfect verb he 3rd person masculine singular form with and interrogative article הָ (ha); so that הָיִרְצָה (hă-yir-tseh) becomes “will be pleased.” הֲיִרְצָה יְהוָה is thus, best translated “will the Lord be pleased.” /bə-’al-pê/ בְּאַלְפֵי morphologically shows a number in a masculine plural common tense, prefixed by a preposition – בְּ and rendered as “with thousands.” The following word – אֵילִים (’ê-lim) is a noun masculine plural meaning “rams.” (Strong, 2001).

To end the first question in v. 7, three words – בְּרִבְבוֹת גְּזֵרֵי־נָחַלִּים beginning with a pluralized number that modifies “river of oil” are used in the form “with ten thousands of rivers of oil?” The second question of the verse begins with the word הָאֲתִן (ha-’et-ên) – a verb Qal imperfect tense appearing in the 1st person common singular which RSV translated “shall I give.” The verb functions as a noun phrase modifier here to describe the masculine common noun בְּכוֹרִי (bə-kō-w-rî) “my firstborn” in the 1st person common singular.

This is followed by another masculine singular common noun personalized in the 1st person common singular in the final form פִּשְׁעֵי (piš-’î) – “[for] my transgression” in RSV. The end of the question has four words with fewer morphological complexities. בְּטֶנֶי תֵּטְאֵת נֶפְשִׁי (pə-rî bit-nî hat-tat nap-šî.). פְּרִי (pə-rî) is a masculine common singular noun meaning “the fruit”. בְּטֶנֶי (bit-nî) is a feminine singular common noun in the 1st person common singular, translated in RSV as “of my body.” תֵּטְאֵת (hat-tat) in the text appears in a feminine singular common noun “the sin” albeit “[for] the sin.” The last word translated “of my soul” in the verse is נֶפְשִׁי (nap-šî). The ending of the word shows it is in the 1st person common singular as in “my” “I” (Strong, 2001; Ellinger and Rudolph, 2006).

Micah 6:8 is a response to the various questions in v. 6 and v. 7. לְהִגִּיד לְךָ אֲדָם (hig-gid lə-kā ’ā-dām) shows clearly that the hilfil verb (הִגִּיד – hif, perf, 3ms, הִגִּיד, told) unequivocally addresses man אֲדָם (’ā-dām) in a generic sense of humankind as in Genesis 1:26; Exodus 30:32; Leviticus 5:3; among others. RSV use of “shown” for הִגִּיד is acceptable in the sense that it conveys the same meaning as told.

The other important Hebrew words in the verse are: דָּרַשׁ (dō-w-rêš) – Qal participle masculine singular with the absolute, שָׁרַשׁ, meaning “require.” Following this is עָשׂוֹת (‘ā-sōwt) – another qal verb with the infinitive construct, עָשֵׂה, “to do.” It is important to stress here that עָשֵׂה portends an action modifying, first, the masculine singular noun מִשְׁפָּט (misphat), “justice” and the rest of the required actions following. אָהַבְתָּ (’a-hă-bat) – a qal infinitive verb with the construct, אָהַב, to love, is prefixed here with a conjunction (ו) in the form וְאָהַבְתָּ (wə-’a-hă-bat), “and to love.” This verb modifies the noun חֶסֶד (hesed). The final verb לָכַת (le-ket) – qal, infinitive with the construct, לָךְ, “to walk.” This is to be done humbly with God עִמָּךְ לָכַת “and humbly walk with your God” in a literal sense (Strong, 2001; Ellinger and Rudolph, 2006).

Exegetical X-ray of Micah 6:6-8

The grammatical structure of Micah 6:6-8 in Hebrew is quite straightforward. The passage consists of questions in vs. 6 and 7, followed by a statement in v. 8. Each of the questions in vs. 6 and 7 begins with the Hebrew word הֲ (ha), which is a particle that introduces a question. The questions are rhetorical in nature and are designed to emphasize the futility of trying to please God through external acts of worship, such as offering sacrifices without correspondent ethical actions of fairness to others in the society (Boloje 2017).

Verse six of Micah 6:6-8 reads “With what shall I come before the Lord and bow myself before God on high? Shall I come before him with burn offerings, with calves a year old?” It is the beginning of the series of questions terminating in v. 7; and showing the rejection of rituals and sacrifices as alternative to doing justice (Kabongo 2021). The context is the legal suit brought by YHWH against Israel in form of a suzerain and a vassal (Laney 1981, Steele 2013). Anderson and Freedman (2000) identify the two dominant voices in the legal drama as YHWH’s and the people of Israel. As Spence-Jones (2004) rightly observes, it is unlikely that Balak is the speaker of verses 6-7 with Balaam giving his response in verse eight as some have asserted. What is more plausible is that Micah in these verses (6-8) speaks for the people of Israel, personifying a single, inquisitive worshipper, and also for YHWH as His oracle. God’s charge against Israel had been presented and Micah now responds.

Piggot (nd) cautions scholars who imagine that vs. 6-7 was spoken by either King Ahaz or Mannaseh and argue that such views are perhaps too hasty to link the text to the period because of the mention of human sacrifice and for the fact that these two kings were said to have sacrificed their sons, most likely to the cult of Molech, an ancient Canaanite god with a sanctuary near Topheth. Concerning the seeming rejection of rituals and sacrifices in Micah 6:6-8, Mays (1976) has noted that historically, the text does not suggest outright rejection of sacrifices nor does it intend to be a final word on the subject. In fact, the text goes to the extreme in naming sacrifices in a sort of ironic hyperbole to include those that were practically impossible to do as well as those abominable to perform. Spence-Jones (2004) again is of the opinion that not all agree as to the spirit from which the content of vs. 6-7 proceeded. While some see Israel’s response in the rhetoric questions to be full of arrogance and self-righteousness; others see them truly acknowledging their sin in some degree and sincerely desiring means for propitiation. The beginning of v. 6, אֶקְדָּם יְהוָה בַּמָּה (bam-mah ‘â-qad-dem Yah-weh) “with what shall I come before the LORD,” clearly suggests that Israel now seeks to approach Yahweh and amend its ways. Allen (1978) tolls this line of thought when he notes that the people’s acknowledgement of God in His high place (מְרוֹם) says something about the recognition that they are under Yahweh’s sovereign authority. This unique expression is also seen in Psalm 92:8. Allen (1978) maintains that they

desire to come before the Lord (אָקָדָם). This word means “to go meet” or “appear in the presence” of the Lord. This signifies humility and gives a glimpse of a repentant heart. They desire to come before the Lord, and they know that they should not appear before him empty-handed. So they ask if they should bring burnt offerings or sacrifice year old calves. Burnt offerings were demanding sacrifices where the whole animal was offered, unlike others where the offering was also eaten by the worshipper in a meal.

Like Mays, Boloje (2017) agrees that the self-abasement displayed in v. 6-7 is a way of admitting and confessing the absolute sovereignty of Yahweh; who for the speaker is higher than human imagination. לְאֱלֹהֵי מְרוֹם “God on high” is reminiscent of YHWH who occupies the high home of heaven from where he dispenses supports for the needy and distressed (Ps. 7:8; 18:17; 68:19; 144:7; Isa 58:4; Lam 4:13). The first sacrifice imagined is in line with OT’s acceptable offerings. הֲאֶקְדָּמְנוּ בְּצֹלוֹת “Shall I come before Him with burnt offerings?” Burnt offering is preferred probably for its wide coverage in Israel. It was especially offered to solve the problem of sin (Lev. 9:7; 22:27). In the Old Testament, בְּצֹגְלִים בְּנֵי year old calves were regarded as the best sacrifice. They were matured for sacrifice from seven days old (Lev 22:27, Ex 22:30). Although usually seen as two separate types of sacrifices, the burnt offerings and year-old calves could be an example of hendiadys, making the calves to be the burnt offerings (Clark and Mundhenk, 1982). According to Smith (1992), a close look at the questions suggests that Israel assumes that God is the problem, and that something must be done to change his attitude towards them. They desire to please God, but show their ignorance.

Apparently, הֲאֶקְדָּמְנוּ בְּצֹלוֹת בְּצֹגְלִים בְּנֵי שָׁנָה (ha-’ā-qad-də-men-nū bə-’ō-w-lowt ba-’ā-gālim bə-nê šā-nāh) “Shall I come before him with burn offerings, with calves a year old,” shows that Israel do not realize that sacrifices are not what are lacking, but righteousness. They are eager to obtain God’s approval, but are completely ignorant of the means by which to do so. Similarly, in Micah 6:7 Israel ask “Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or in ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?” The concern here is on what quantity of material things Israel imagine could possibly be pleasing יְרֻצָּה to Yahweh; and what they could give אֶתָּן to God. Here, they, as Allen (2004) puts it, “turn from quality of offering to quantity” (p. 370). For Smith (1992), the word (יְרֻצָּה), typically understood as “pleased,” is a technical term of the priest who would examine sacrifices and declare them fit for presentation to God (Lev 1:4; 22:25).

Although אֵילִים בְּאַלְפֵי (bə-’al-pê ’ê-lim) “thousands of rams” and נְחֹלֵי־שֶׁמֶן בְּרִבְבוֹת (bə-rib-bōwt na-hā-lêšā-men) “ten thousand rivers of oil” suggests exaggeration of numbers and should be considered hyperbolic, it does however, gives the impression that Israel had imagined large quantity of sacrifice as proper propitiation for their sins. As Allen (2004) helps us recall, King Solomon and other kings did sacrifice sheep and cattle in large numbers compared to these (1 Kings 3:4; 8:63; 2 Chron. 30:24; 35:7). Generally, rams (אֵילִים) (Lev. 5:15) and olive oil (שֶׁמֶן) (Lev 2:1, 4, 15) were common sacrificial substances in the Old Testament. These items are not concocted here but mentioned to show that Israel had not forgotten the acceptable sacrifices. However, they had become oblivious of righteousness. The progression of size and value of intended sacrifices finally reaches a climax at the end of verse seven. Here, Israel personified in the speaker seems desperate, realizing that his suggestions up to this point have been futile. Now the speaker asks if God would be pleased with the most valuable sacrifice that a man could give,

his own first-born son. But this thought is completely unreasonable because God had explicitly forbidden this as an abomination (Lev 18:21).

Boloje (2017) imagines that the suggestion to offer a first-born בְּכוֹרִי הָאֶתֶן “to give my firstborn” would have been astonishing to YHWH. He is the rightful owner of the firstborn since the exodus from Egypt. However, there is a provision for redemption by a substitute offering (Ex. 13:2; 22:28; 34:20). “Although reported cases of human sacrifice in Israel are rare and are told as exceptional cases (cf. Lev 20:2–5; Judg 11:30–40; 2 Kgs 3:27; 16:3; 17:17; 21:6; 23:10; Jer 7:31; 19:5), the practice is strictly prohibited in Israel (Deut 12:31; 18:10; Lev 18:21; 20:2–5).” (p. 813) Israel should have known this from both the sacrifice of Isaac required by God in Genesis 22, and from the law concerning the consecration of the first-born in Exodus 13:12-13 (Kiel and Delitzsch, 2002; Clark and Mundhenk, 1982).

It is also stated here that the people mention their transgression (פְּשָׁע) and sin (חַטָּאת) for the first time. Could these have meant that Israel at this time realized their sins or were they mocking the notion that they actually had a sin problem, and that God’s claims are unsubstantiated? Allen’s position that the two nouns (פְּשָׁע) and (חַטָּאת) grammatically are more likely causal accusatives than appositional terms, points the answer to this question to the later. However, in view of v. 8, it is appropriate to think that Israel here had realized their transgressions and sins and genuinely sought reparations. The Hebrew word (נַפְשִׁי) is often understood as soul, as it is here, but it also could have the understanding of talking of the whole person. If that is the case, then it could be translated “my sin” instead of “the sin of my soul” (Allen, 1978, p. 369).

The statement in Micah 6:8 comes as the verdict of an assumed judge between God and Israel, but it is Micah who is speaking the divine oracle of Yahweh and prescribing Yahweh’s demands for the nation of Israel. Allen (1978) deduces that the personification of the speaker of vs. 6-7 is seen here as man (אָדָם). He also notices that the word is more often used collectively than of a single person. Therefore, in addressing Israel this way the contrast of the “God on high” (אֱלֹהֵי מְרוֹם) of v. 6 is contrasted with simple אָדָם here (p. 371). This study departs from Allen’s view that אָדָם in v. 8 personified the speaker of vs. 6 and 7 whether as a single speaker or in a collective sense. What is more appropriate for us is that אָדָם as used in v. 8 represents man in the sense of mankind or humanity as a whole. Boloje (2017) already clarifies the Hebrew word אָדָם as used here as “infinite inclusive and vocative.” This goes beyond Mays (1976) suggestion that apart from its generic reference to mankind, it appropriately addresses “any man in Israel” (p. 141).

Israel’s expression of willingness to engage in extravagant sacrifices, as Boloje (2017) puts it, underscores the point that they had forgotten the basic requirement for human existence. For us, אָדָם in v. 8 transcends Israel as a nation and the idea of the traditional covenant people. Yahweh’s concern here, is no longer only about the covenant people but the whole of humanity. It seems in all circumstances that the text imagined mankind in stating the ultimate rule for a worthy life on earth even though Israel is at the center of the conversation. Thus, whether the text is read to the original covenant community of Micah’s day or presently in a community without the knowledge of the Mosaic covenant, אָדָם as used in the text allows every human to hear the voice of YHWH in the text.

Verse 8 begins with the Hebrew verb גִּיד (gid), which means “to tell” or “to declare.” This verb is in the perfect tense, which indicates completed action. The subject of the verb is the third-person

masculine singular pronoun הוּא (hu), which means “he.” The antecedent of this pronoun is the LORD, who is the implied subject of the previous questions. According to Barker (2001), this verse is one of the best summaries of the law in the Old Testament. The rabbis who commented on this verse in the early centuries called it “a one-line summary of the whole Law” (p. 112). Micah now addresses Israel and tells them what God requires of them. Apparently, they should have already known what God required of them because He had already told them multiple times in passages such as Deuteronomy 10:12-13. Micah has nothing new to say to them. God has already told them (הֵגִיד לָכֵן, hig-gid lə-kā) what is good (טוֹב, tob) and what he required (דָּרָשׁ דּוֹרֵשׁ, dō-w-rêš).

There should have been no mystery or question about what God had required. And it had nothing to do with sacrifice and offering. V. 8 is the climax of the passage; it provides a clear and concise summary of what the Lord requires of his people. The three infinitive constructs in this verse are connected by the conjunction וְ (ve), which is a common conjunction that means “and.” The use of this conjunction emphasizes the importance of each of the three requirements and suggests that they are all necessary for a complete and fulfilling relationship with God.

There were simply three things that God required of his people. The first infinitive construct is עָשׂוּת which means “to do” or “to make.” The second infinitive construct is וְאַהֲבָה which means “to love.” The third infinitive construct is וְהִצְטַנְּנוּ which means “to humble” or “to submit. These three infinitive constructs describe what the Lord requires of his people: to do justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with God. They are first to do justice (מִשְׁפָּט). The qal verb עָשׂוּת (‘ā-sōwt) “to do” comes in an active voice of a required and necessary action. מִשְׁפָּט (miš-pāt) as a Hebrew word has a broad meaning and involves right and fair relationships in the community, especially in legal and financial affairs (Clark and Mundhenk, 1982). Justice is necessary for people to live together in the way that God intended. But Israel at this time could even be defined as unjust. Injustice ruled in Israel, and this made temple worship a mockery of Israel’s faith (Craigie, 2001). עָשׂוּת מִשְׁפָּט “to do justice” is the first prescription in the order of the three critical requirements stated in Micah 6:8. Becker (2020) imagines that to do justice became imperative because Israel had become accustomed to injustice as a norm. Earlier in the book, the term מִשְׁפָּט had only been used in relation to cases against unjust leaders (Mic. 3:1, 3:8, 3:9).

Tuchima (2019) notes well that the period Micah prophesied was marked with exploitations that resulted to injustices against the people. עָשׂוּת מִשְׁפָּט as a universal call to do justice especially envisioned the church becoming advocates of social justice for the poor and oppressed people across the world (Kabongo 2021).

וְרַחֲמִים is also requested to love mercy (רַחֲמִים). RSV interestingly translated רַחֲמִים (hesed) here as kindness “...and to love kindness.” This does no injustice to the original Hebrew. Like doing justice, focused on actions toward others, רַחֲמִים here also concerns actions towards others. The rich word רַחֲמִים as used here is described by Allen (1978) as “a word of relationship, expressing an attitude of covenant obligation” (p. 371). It is not so simple for some scholars. רַחֲמִים has some complexities, and it is not clear whether it necessarily involves a covenant or means fidelity to a covenant. What is clear is that רַחֲמִים refers both to an attitude as well as to actions, and the King James Version’s rendering of “loving-kindness” is archaic but also quite accurate (Harris, Archer and Waltke, 1999, p. 307). We hold here that whether רַחֲמִים is taken in its covenantal sense, especially because of vs. 3-5 or otherwise, it ultimately, points to the need to be kind to others and to obey God (Clark and

Mundhenk, 1982). Brueggemann (2010) rendering of דָּוָה is “to practice a life of reliable solidarity” (p. 14).

Finally, God tells them to “walk humbly with their God” ($\text{לִלְכוּ-עִם-יְהוָה-בְּהַלְוָה}$). “Walk” here is used in a figurative sense. This requires passive and active obedience towards God (Clark and Mundhenk, 1982). The word (עָנָה) is a rare word, occurring only twice, here and in Proverbs 11:2, where it is contrasted with the word “proud” (Clark and Mundhenk, 1982). It most likely means doing what God wants and not insisting on one’s own will. The first two duties are mostly towards others, but this duty is to God. He expected them to “walk” with Him, just as Enoch and Noah had done. It is this walk that God truly desires, and not rituals or sacrifices.

Implications for Indigenous Readers in Nigeria

There are several implications of a thorough exegetical x-ray of Micah 6:6-8 for indigenous readers in Nigeria. Over the past five decades, indigenous traditional worshippers in Nigeria have been turning to Christianity as their new found faith; and in recent times, Judaism is also finding acceptability among Nigerians. Both religions depend heavily on the Old Testament as their text of faith. As expected, there is a gap between the demands of these religions and indigenous culture. There is the problem of misappropriation of biblical passages. This challenge is potentially mitigated by a proper adaptation of biblical principles in indigenous contexts, necessitating proper hermeneutics of the Bible.

Many Old Testament scholars as shown in this work, place emphasis on Micah 6:6-8 in favour of the ongoing covenant tradition between Yahweh and the children of Israel. The dominant reading is that Yahweh in this text only seeks obedience to the Mosaic covenant. Rarely is any serious attention given in detail to the universal implication of אָדָם to whom the entire v.8 is addressed. This tends to alienate and pose the danger of exclusion to indigenous readers of the text. For Nigerians who are not part of the Mosaic covenant, for instance, this could mislead to imagine that the text is only appropriate for the traditional covenant society.

It is interpretatively correct that Micah 6:6-8 alludes the Mosaic covenant and its infractions by the children of Israel, especially from the historical setting of v.3-5. However, a more comprehensive reading must take to account that Israel’s failure to not only meet the obligations of the covenant but their failure to live as example of a just and holy people to other nations, is central to Yahweh’s universal call to justice in v.8. In this sense, Yahweh is no longer looking to the children of Israel as a model nation (Ex. 19:5,6; Duet. 7:6; 26:19; 28:1), but appeals to mankind as a whole in stating the ultimate requirements for human existence.

The universal application of the text is relevant in addressing the struggle other cultural contexts may encounter in interrogating their own environment and lived experiences on the basis of the text, this paper takes Micah 6:6-8 as an address to humanity as a whole by hinging on אָדָם “o man” as the insignia for the universal application of the text. It sees justice like few scholars above, as a moral responsibility seeking the fulfillment of demands imposed on humans at various levels of relationships; and fairness of actions and conducts in fulfilling the obligations of one’s relationships with others in the society. This also aligns with the various meanings delineated in the conceptual framework of this study.

Furthermore, a proper interpretation of Micah 6:6-8 could offer a solution to the predicament of unscrupulous individuals and politicians in Nigeria who embezzle public funds and impoverish

the masses with the expectation that their illicit activities and unjust actions will be absolved through participation in religious rituals such as church or mosque attendance, pilgrimage, or financial support of religious activities. Micah 6:6-8 represents a step toward a more equitable society, prompting all to scrutinize their life experiences in pursuit of a fairer society. As previously mentioned, Nigerians who see the Bible as a text of faith can identify with the inclusive use of the control phrase: אָדָם לְיָהוָה הִגִּיד “I have told you o man” in the text. אָדָם implies that every human being, regardless of culture or location around the world, should find their place within the text and contextually reevaluate the issue of justice in their peculiar contexts.

Conclusion

Interpretation is key to proper adaption of biblical texts, especially in other contexts. In this study, the call to do justice עֲשׂוּת מִשְׁפָּט is an inalienable universal call to fulfill the demands of every relationship in fairness of actions and conducts. It is a call to prioritize social responsibilities ahead of religious and ritualistic observances. It is a call to look beyond the traditional boundaries of covenant obedience to compassion for the poor and the vulnerable in the society. To do justice is to deliberately attend to the marginalized by promoting and pushing principles and policies that can ameliorate their plight. It is a call to fair consideration of the other. It is a call to uphold that which is right in human relationship. Finally, to do justice is to act in accordance with God’s overall will for continuous human good. For us, these are the final products of a proper exegetical x-ray of Micah 6:6-8.

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