

National Leaders and Prophets Rebuked Micah 3:1-12

Prophets always get our attention – for good or bad reasons. And we gravitate to stories like Baptist preacher Charles Spurgeon provides. Occasionally he felt moved by the Holy Spirit to pause while preaching, pointed at someone he did not know, and described that person's situation so accurately, people were amazed. Once, he told a shoemaker exactly how much money he had pilfered during the previous week. We might think this rude, but in applying Scripture so specifically to people's hearts, he bore witness to its truthfulness and glorified the God who inspired it. Sound like what occurred with Ananias and Sapphira. (Acts 5:1-11)

Micah challenges us to examine our own lives, our need for the Lord Jesus, our need to change our behavior, attitudes, & values, and our need especially for repentance, forgiveness, and a Savior. He describes how leaders of nations, groups, and even churches become evil.

Today we begin looking at the **second cycle** that is chapters 3 through 5. You could label this as Against the Establishment. The **first part** begins with Micah speaking directly to the leaders of Jacob and the rulers of the house of Israel. They were leading the nation in the departure of faith that had been given to them through the Old Testaments prophets & Moses.

He did not make himself popular. Chapter 3 is one of the most powerful of Micah's presentations. He pointed out how the leaders were being dragging their nation to ruin. They were misleaders. Remind you of any leaders today?

(Verse 1) The term, "*leaders of Jacob,*" refers to those heading up and prominent in the civil life of that day. This would be the elders, the tribal chiefs of the various clans and families of Judah. We would say today, the bureaucrats and the leaders and rich with influence.

The term, "*rulers of the house of Israel,*" refers to those who were in governmental positions.

These people had power and authority to make decisions. The language here implies these were people running the legal system and courts. They were people who knew the laws.

Micah then asks a key question. "*Should you not know justice?*" These leaders had been ignoring the demands of righteousness, good governance, and fairness. They were supposed to know and carry out the laws and justice. It is important to know that the term "Justice" in the Bible refers to justice as we think of it. But it often means – true religion. The Bible sees religion and justice as being one thing – not as two separate items in our thinking and actions.

Micah was not being subtle here. He was not hinting or suggesting. He was just blunt. He accused the legal system of corruption. He presents an evil picture of injustice that comes from the governmental workers and the judges and leaders who know wickedness and take bribes and do not follow the Lord's laws.

In the first two chapters, Micah addressed the greedy rich who were committing crimes against their own citizens and humanity. Here, he turns his attention to those who excuse the crimes, allow violations to take place, and help law breaking be committed. These are the people in charge, the deciders, whose job it is to make sure justice occurs. But they are not.

Which leads to the indictment & description in **verses 2 & 3**. "*The leaders hate good and love evil.*" Why can Micah say this? Because their actions speak louder than words. This serious accusation and condemnation is one of the most shocking pictures in the Bible. Essentially, Micah is calling the leaders cannibals. They are like butchers and wild beasts, feeding on their own people. Any countries and leaders come to mind? In history as well as today?

(Verse 3) Micah is being harsh & descriptive. That is the point. His book of a few hundred words, does what the authors Dickens and Dostoevsky devote entire books to. Micah puts us into the depths of human agony, despair, and

burning hatred, where the waters of bitter, bloody, and uncontrollable violent revolutions are heated to the point of erupting like social geysers. The feast described here is the total opposite of Jesus' parable of the wedding banquet. (Mt 22:1-14 or L 14:15- 24)

“Should you not know justice, you who hate good and love evil?” It is not good to be the target of that question. But it gets even worse.

(Verse 4) When they cry out to God, God will not answer. In fact, God will hide from them because of the evil they have done. Micah singles the leaders out when he places the ideals of their office and power, against their failures. They pervert justice. Even worse, they pervert the justice they themselves are to uphold and carry out and make happen.

But it is worse. They may be crooks, but they are always in church for the national day of fasting and prayer. They want the superficiality of religion, which helps them look good, and get votes, and gives them respectability. They hope this protects them from God's judgment. They use polite society to support horrible injustice. They know society will allow them to get away with it because it would not be polite to call them out. But God through Micah and many prophets, call people out. They tell people like this, and everyone, what they are doing. They are saying, wake up, repent!

There is irony here in verse 4 because Micah uses a verb, *“cry out,”* that is also a technical term for what someone does when appealing to a judge when they are a victim. The irony is that the judge who will not listen to victims, now makes the same victim's cry to the Great Judge. These leaders think they will be heard. But they are self-centered and unrepentant.

And Micah tells them, God will not hear you. That is a bad place to be. There is nothing worse that could happen to you than to have God reject you, to hide his face from you. It is the exact opposite of the blessing we often hear as a benediction. “May the Lord's face shine

upon you. May the Lord lift up his countenance upon you.” And what does that bring? “Peace, Shalom.” We like to think that we can presume on God's grace and love. But the Bible tells us – not always, and not everyone finds peace.

That's the first part of Micah 3. Accusations & condemnation of a country's leaders, whose religion does not carry over from worship into their weekly activities. Disobedience leads to separation from the Almighty. And *“because of the evil they have done,”* verse 4, not carrying out the justice their roles should do, people isolate themselves from their Creator. Instead of being shepherds, they are butchers.

Micah chapters 1 and 2 pronounce woe on the wealthy and their false prophets. Micah 3, verses 1-4, describes the nations leaders in condemnatory fashion. Then **the second section**, verses 5-8, talks about the prophets.

It starts with, **verse 5**, *“This is what the Lord says.”* If Micah has not received attention so far, this should do it. It is like saying, “God told me to tell you.” Previously Micah had rebuked the soft preaching of those who said that everything was fine. But now he describes the religious leaders in really unpleasant terms. They lead people astray. They are paid to preach what they are paid to say. And if they do not preach what the establishment wants, war is waged on them. Micah is telling church leaders, they are not doing their job.

What is their job? To lead the people in the ways of God. To preach and live out the just laws of their Almighty Creator. But they do not. Instead, they put on a good show of piety while being as greedy as the other leaders. Do they try to find remedies for the abuses of the people? No, just the opposite!

Do they intercede with the nation's leaders and wealthy in the name of justice and fairness and applying the law? No, instead they use their position and power and influence to also become rich.

Do they share the hardships and miseries of their people who are in desperate need? No, instead they cater to the whims of the establishment and the powerful.

In short, they are corrupt and corruptible. Any of this sound familiar today? Any people, or companies or elected officials or religious leaders you can point to? In essence, Micah was saying that religion instead of uplifting people, and fighting for the people, had become a system of racketeering carried out by unscrupulous religious leaders for their own selfish profit, position, power, and status.

Is it any wonder that Jesus described the leaders of his day: “Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like white-washed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of the bones of the dead and everything unclean. In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but, on the inside, you are full of hypocrisy & wickedness.” (Mt 23:27-28) Guess not much had changed since Micah’s days!

Have you ever become lost and received directions from someone who helped you get even more lost? That is the situation here. Instead of the religious leaders helping the people, they joined in, in hurting them, for their own personal gain. Instead of doing their job, being the voice and example of Jesus, they were looking out for themselves. Instead of standing up to evil, they joined in with evil. Are residential schools and example of this?

The word, “*to lead astray*,” is a term we need to examine. It is often used for people who are wandering around or have been led to wander. It is also used to describe “causing someone to be drunk.” So, it is a picture of those who are leading people in the wrong direction and wrong values and causing them to wander about lost and stagger as drunks.

Can you name any such people today? Which leaders, countries and businesses are leading people in fake news, untruths, and false values

today? This occurs with national propaganda, and business advertisements, but it also happens in religious circles in various ways.

And who is allowing themselves to be led by false prophets, political leaders, religious leaders, business leaders and the media? I think we could name a few. These people should be helping people, promoting God’s values, not making people’s situation worse. After a while it’s becomes the deliberately blind leading the deliberately blind.

“*If one feeds them, they proclaim ‘peace,’*” is another phrase we need to pay attention to. Simply it means, whoever feeds them perks, whoever gives them money, whoever pays the most, receive the “blessing,” the “peace.” Or we could play with this in the English language Whoever gives them their piece, p, i e, c, e.

That is corruption. And when these prophets and others, do not get paid, they declare war on those they expect to pay them. Another way to say this is, when some people receive gifts, they alter, transform their message, so that it is suitable for those who are giving them gifts. Can you name where this is occurring today?

Unfortunately, the technology we have allows people to go after each other in unkind and cruel ways. Do people do this because they are not compensated? Is their selfish gain for being mean and untruthful? And it is really evil when religious people are involved in these activities. Truth is lost when leaders messages match the customer’s pocket. Micah is saying that this occurred back then. We should not be surprised it occurs today. It is plain out wrong when religious leaders lead people astray.

Micah is not the last person to be thoroughly disgusted with the contradictions in which religious leaders frequently become involved. And when they give pious explanations that are little more than moral evasions. A servant of God either serves God or does not. Scripture says, you cannot serve two masters. She or he either gets their directive from the living God

and not some other source or purpose. This also is about lay people and not just pastors.

It is becoming more and more recognized that North American Christianity and society is less and less about following Jesus, and more and more about political correctness – in some form. One reason is church members do not know their Bibles in their heart of hearts. It was a shock when one famous mega church said, members lifestyle, values & beliefs were not different than when they joined the church.

Another reason is leaders and people have adapted some idea that is directly contrary to the Bible, so they fight against a biblical value.

And too many are simply mean – and the rest of the congregation does not want to fight. Is it any wonder the church is losing members?

Plus, people want to be entertained more than make the effort to be disciples. Many people seem to have altered the Sermon on the Mount to: “Blessed are the politically powerful, for theirs is the kingdom of God. Blessed are the culture warriors, for they will be called children of God.”

My point is, Micah is not just speaking to the people and leaders of his time. His words are for us today. A question. How many people looking at congregations today, see the face of Jesus? And in this church?

So, what now? **Verse 6**, begins with the word, “*Therefore*.” That is another biblical clue to - listen up. What will happen to the prophets and religious leaders is described in 4 synonymous and forceful picturesque statements. They were at the point of being discredited because people would come to see them as quacks.

“It shall be night to you, without vision,
and darkness to you, without revelation.
The sun shall go down upon the prophets,
and the day shall be black over them.”

I suspect in Hebrew this became a popular saying describing these dishonest leaders. As well as the people who follow them.

Verse 7 continues the condemnation. The leaders will hide their faces in disgrace and shame. The people who were supposed to share vision – have no vision. Their wisdom will be dark, like the night without the sun.

Why? Because they have no answer from God. We can imagine that this angered the prophets because Micah was attacking their livelihood. It is like what occurred to Paul when the silver smiths in Ephesus lost trade because of Paul’s preaching about the one true God instead of the gods that their statues represented. (Acts 19)

Then the **third** section of Micah 3 begins with Micah contrasting himself with the evil leaders. (**Verse 8**) He has power, God’s Spirit, justice & might. That gives him the authority to tell the leaders of Israel about their transgressions and sins. That is really making yourself a target. He is saying I’m representing the Almighty God & you are not doing what your Creator expects.

Micah never allowed personal advantage to take precedence over the demands of justice. This gave him moral courage. He is showing them and us, what a real prophet looks like. And we get the sense that Micah was alone, set off against all the establishment and religious leaders of his day. That is a lonely place to be.

This often happens with true religious leaders. John Wesley more than once, preached and was told he would never preach at that church again. He records this in his journals. This occurs today. And we see well known leaders, attacked and often leave their pastorate and denomination because it just does not come close to representing the Jesus, they believe in. Rose and I were threatened and told to not preach certain things in one congregation we co-pastored.

At a major mission seminar, in the bus back to where we stayed, some people complained loudly against Billy Graham’s sermon where he spoke against violence, war and especially the use of nuclear weapons. That was a shock to hear. As if war and nuclear fallout is good.

Then in **verse 9**, Micah starts a concluding statement about all leaders. He says they have lost their sense of fair dealing. Their ideas of justice are abhorrent and distorted. They are full of exploitation and greed. He says their theology and practices are evil.

Verse 10 isn't complementary either. They build on blood and wickedness and corruption. This is quite an indictment. Can you name the leaders who could be accused like this today?

Micah continues to be blunt in his summary describing the leaders in **Verse 11**. They judge for a bribe. The priests teach for a price. The prophets tell fortunes for money. Money rather than God's principle, values, & truth guided all the nation's leaders in most of their dealings. But worst of all, they calm and sooth and placate people with untruths. They pretend to "*lean on the Lord.*"

Verse 12, offers us another, "Therefore." Micah like always is very descriptive. Eleven verses describe the nation's leadership liabilities. Verse 12 is Micah's prophetic summary of the nation's future. The predicted doom will become a reality. The leaders did not take Micah, or any of the prophets seriously.

Because of them is an accusation of doom. You leaders are to blame for the calamity that Zion and Jerusalem will experience. The lands will be ruined. Jerusalem will be a heap of rubble. Plus, that temple hill, that sacred site, will become a deserted mound of thickets. It is not a nice prediction. This is why Godly leaders often are disliked, hated, not listened to, and persecuted. Their calling is not to make people happy, to give them what they want to hear.

Let's be clear about why this prophecy was fulfilled. And maybe it's been fulfilled a few times in history. And why it may occur again. It is not about being opposed to true theology. The leaders are not saying God does not exist. Instead, at the heart of this evil, the leaders are rejecting Almighty God's laws, values, ways of living and purposes. And they try to manipulate

God and his word for their own benefit. The result? The people and nations suffer.