



Micah - Chapter Three

Summary of Chapter Three

The abuse of power (vv.1-4) and flagrant misuse of prophetic office (vv.5-8) is followed by a general indictment of the leadership, followed by the sentence (vv.9-12).

III Micah 3:1-5:15 - The Present Injustice and the Future Prospect of Just Rule in Jerusalem

The second section focuses on the corrupt leadership in the house of Israel (3:1-12); Jerusalem's restoration among the nations is promised (4:1-7), and accomplished (4:8-5:15).

III.a Micah 3:1-12 - Wicked Rulers and Prophets

Refer to the chapter summary above.

III.a.i Micah 3:1-4 - Judgement against the Heads of Jacob

Micah describes the depraved character of the civil leaders using the gruesome imagery of cannibalism.

- ¹ And I said:
Listen, you heads of Jacob
and rulers of the house of Israel!
Should you not know justice? —
- ² you who hate the good and love the evil,
who tear the skin off my people,
and the flesh off their bones;

3 who eat the flesh of my people,
flay their skin off them,
break their bones in pieces,
and chop them up like meat in a kettle,
like flesh in a cauldron.

Micah 3:1-3

Listen, you heads of Jacob. Previously, Micah addressed his comments to God's people in general. Now he specifically speaks to their leaders, because they have both a special responsibility and accountability before God: <<*Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers and sisters, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness*>> (James 3:1).

Should you not know justice? Delighting in God's law and discerning what is right should be the joy of those given judicial responsibility, a responsibility of the priests and the king, such as David: <<*Oh, how I love your law! It is my meditation all day long*>> (Psalm 119:97), or as seen with Solomon: <<*All Israel heard of the judgement that the king had rendered; and they stood in awe of the king, because they perceived that the wisdom of God was in him, to execute justice*>> (1 Kings 3:28). Instead, they abuse their powers: <<*Ah, you who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter!*>> (Isaiah 5:20).

You who hate the good and love the evil. If this description is not bad enough, Micah goes on to illustrate how terribly the leaders of Israel and Judah 'use' the people, as if they were cannibals feasting on the people of God. This is a reminder that the people never exist for the sake of the leaders, but leaders are there for the sake of the people. A leader should never serve God's people dominated by the question, "What is in it for me?" When they do, they are like the cannibalistic leaders described by Micah.

Tear, eat, flay, break and chop. The imagery of cannibalism is used to symbolise the destructive violence of the leaders against the oppressed: <<*The murderer rises at dusk to kill the poor and needy, and in the night is like a thief*>> (Job 24:14), <<*Have they no knowledge, all the evildoers who eat up my people as they eat bread, and do not call upon the Lord?*>> (Psalm 14:4), <<*When evildoers assail me to devour my flesh – my adversaries and foes – they shall stumble and fall*>> (Psalm 27:2), <<*There are those – how lofty are their eyes, how high their eyelids lift! – there are those whose teeth are swords, whose teeth are knives, to devour the poor from off the earth, the needy from among mortals*>> (Proverbs 30:14), <<*Through the wrath of the Lord of hosts the land was burned, and the people became like fuel for the fire; no one spared another. They gorged on the right, but still were hungry, and they devoured*>>

on the left, but were not satisfied; they devoured the flesh of their own kindred; Manasseh devoured Ephraim, and Ephraim Manasseh, and together they were against Judah. For all this, his anger has not turned away; his hand is stretched out still>> (Isaiah 9:19-21), <<You have not strengthened the weak, you have not healed the sick, you have not bound up the injured, you have not brought back the strayed, you have not sought the lost, but with force and harshness you have ruled them>> (Ezekiel 34:4), <<The officials within it are roaring lions; its judges are evening wolves that leave nothing until the morning>> (Zephaniah 3:3), and: <<The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly>> (John 10:10).

⁴ Then they will cry to the Lord,
but he will not answer them;
he will hide his face from them at that time,
because they have acted wickedly.

Micah 3:4

Then they will cry to the Lord, but he will not answer them. This is one example of God's judgement against the corrupt leaders. When they cry out for God's help, he will remain silent: <<*When you returned and wept before the Lord, the Lord would neither heed your voice nor pay you any attention*>> (Deuteronomy 1:45), <<*And in that day you will cry out because of your king, whom you have chosen for yourselves; but the Lord will not answer you in that day*>> (1 Samuel 8:18), and: <<*Therefore, thus says the Lord, assuredly I am going to bring disaster upon them that they cannot escape; though they cry out to me, I will not listen to them*>> (Jeremiah 11:11).

But he will not answer them; he will hide his face. In just retribution, those who would not hear the cries of the people will now find that God will not hear them. God's silence is part of their sentence. One aspect of the blessing pronounced by the priests of Israel was: <<*the Lord make his face to shine upon you*>> (Numbers 6:25a). Here, Micah promises the opposite of this blessing: <<*Truly, you are a God who hides himself, O God of Israel, the Saviour*>> (Isaiah 45:15). However, with God that is never the end of the story: <<*Then they shall know that I am the Lord their God because I sent them into exile among the nations, and then gathered them into their own land. I will leave none of them behind; and I will never again hide my face from them, when I pour out my spirit upon the house of Israel, says the Lord God*>> (Ezekiel 39:28-29).

III.a.ii Micah 3:5-8 - Judgement against the Prophets

Micah rebukes the false prophets. In the same way that the civil leaders will receive no answer from the Lord, so too erring prophets will receive no vision.

5 Thus says the Lord concerning the prophets
who lead my people astray,
who cry 'Peace'
when they have something to eat,
but declare war against those
who put nothing into their mouths.

Micah 3:5

Thus says the Lord concerning the prophets who lead my people astray. Micah returns to a previous theme first mentioned in Micah 2:11, the false prophets who bring hollow comfort and pretend peace to God's people.

Who cry peace, but declare war. Thus, profit-seeking prophets proclaim that all is well with the world, as long as they receive what they ask for.

When they have something to eat, literally 'who bite (Hebrew *nashak*) with their teeth.' The verb in this form generally refers to the deadly bite of a serpent: <<*Dan shall be a snake by the roadside, a viper along the path, that bites the horse's heels so that its rider falls backwards*>> (Genesis 49:17), and: <<*Then the Lord sent poisonous serpents among the people, and they bit the people, so that many Israelites died*>> (Numbers 21:6); in another form it refers to lending money with interest: <<*You shall not charge interest on loans to another Israelite, interest on money, interest on provisions, interest on anything that is lent. On loans to a foreigner you may charge interest, but on loans to another Israelite you may not charge interest, so that the Lord your God may bless you in all your undertakings in the land that you are about to enter and possess*>> (Deuteronomy 23:19-20).

6 Therefore 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;
7 the seers shall be disgraced,
and the diviners put to shame;
they shall all cover their lips,
for there is no answer from God.

Micah 3:6-7

Darkness to you. Darkness is Hebrew *khashak*. The ‘biting’, Hebrew *nashak* (v.5), of the false prophets results in spiritual blindness: <<*I will bring such distress upon people that they shall walk like the blind; because they have sinned against the Lord, their blood shall be poured out like dust, and their flesh like dung*>> (Zephaniah 1:17), <<*Jesus said, ‘I came into this world for judgement so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind.’ Some of the Pharisees near him heard this and said to him, ‘Surely we are not blind, are we?’ Jesus said to them, ‘If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, “We see”, your sin remains’*>> (John 9:39-41), <<*But whoever hates another believer is in the darkness, walks in the darkness, and does not know the way to go, because the darkness has brought on blindness*>> (1 John 2:11).

The sun shall go down upon the prophets. Through Micah, God announces that he will bring the false prophets into complete confusion and disrepute. They will have no answer from God and therefore they shall be disgraced:

For there is no answer from God. As with the civil leaders (v.4), God’s silence is part of their sentence.

⁸ But as for me, I am filled with power,
with the spirit of the Lord,
and with justice and might,
to declare to Jacob his transgression
and to Israel his sin.

Micah 3:8

But as for me distinguishes Micah and his unpopular message from that of the false prophets.

I am filled with power, with the spirit of the Lord. In contrast to the coming shame of the false prophets, Micah has a justified confidence in the Lord who called him as a prophet. Because he knows God and is close to God and his Word, Micah knows that he is full of power by the Spirit of the Lord. Micah also knew that the power came by the spirit of the Lord, not by anything in Micah. The power also came from justice and might, because Micah knew he was on the side of God’s Word and God’s strength.

To declare to Jacob his transgression. Like most prophets in the OT, Micah’s job was to expose the sin of God’s people: <<*I will expose your righteousness and your works, and they will not benefit you*>> (Isaiah 57:12 NIV).

It might be said that under the New Covenant, prophets have a somewhat different calling. Under the Old Covenant, the law was not written on the heart of the believer and the Holy Spirit did not indwell each believer in the same way as under the New Covenant. Therefore, there was a greater need for the convicting work of the Spirit of God coming from the 'outside,' from prophets such as Micah. In the NT, the Apostle Paul described the ministry of the prophet like this: <<*On the other hand, those who prophesy speak to other people for their building up and encouragement and consolation*>> (1 Corinthians 14:3). This certainly does not mean that under the New Covenant prophecy will never be used to expose sin, but it certainly is not its central purpose.

III.a.iii Micah 3:9-12 - Judgement against the Heads of Jacob

This climactic third oracle of judgement adds priests to the previously addressed civil rulers (vv.1-4) and false prophets (vv.5-8).

- ⁹ Hear this, you rulers of the house of Jacob
and chiefs of the house of Israel,
who abhor justice
and pervert all equity,
¹⁰ who build Zion with blood
and Jerusalem with wrong!

Micah 3:9-10

Hear this, who build Zion with blood and Jerusalem with wrong! In this chapter, Micah first spoke to the judges and then to the prophets, now he speaks to the priests, you rulers of the house of Jacob. The priests in Jerusalem were not much better than the priests of Israel, and could expect similar judgement unless they repented.

Who abhor justice. The priests were meant to know and administer justice, but instead they find it abhorrent.

Pervert all equity. Leaders <<*who hate the good and love the evil*>> (v.2) continue that pattern with twisted judicial decisions.

Who build Zion with blood and Jerusalem with wrong! The role of leadership is intended to lead the people in godly ways. Here, they were self-seeking, used violence to achieve their ends and promoted wickedness in the cause of gaining power and wealth. The prophets frequently spoke out against them: <<*Their feet run to evil, and they rush to shed innocent blood; their thoughts are thoughts of iniquity, desolation and destruction are in their highways*>> (Isaiah 59:7), <<*The faithful have disappeared from the land, and there is no one left who is*

upright; they all lie in wait for blood, and they hunt each other with nets>> (Micah 7:2), <<Ah! City of bloodshed, utterly deceitful, full of booty – no end to the plunder!>> (Nahum 3:1), and: <<Alas for you who build a town by bloodshed, and found a city on iniquity!>> (Habakkuk 2:12).

¹¹ Its rulers give judgement for a bribe,
its priests teach for a price,
its prophets give oracles for money;
yet they lean upon the Lord and say,
‘Surely the Lord is with us!
No harm shall come upon us.’

Micah 3:11

Its rulers, priests, and prophets, all the main groups of leadership, give desired results in exchange for compensation.

Yet they lean upon the Lord and say, ‘Surely the Lord is with us! No harm shall come upon us.’ The leaders of Jerusalem had a false confidence in religious ritual and form. All the while, judgement was appointed for Jerusalem unless they repented.

The great thing about the prophet Micah was that he was listened to. Hosea was ignored, and so was Amos. They threw Jeremiah in jail for his prophetic message of coming judgement. In contrast, King Hezekiah and the leadership of Judah listened to Micah. Jeremiah 26:17-19 describes how even a hundred years later the impact of Micah was remembered: <<And some of the elders of the land arose and said to all the assembled people, ‘Micah of Moresheth, who prophesied during the days of King Hezekiah of Judah, said to all the people of Judah: “Thus says the Lord of hosts, Zion shall be ploughed as a field; Jerusalem shall become a heap of ruins, and the mountain of the house a wooded height.” Did King Hezekiah of Judah and all Judah actually put him to death? Did he not fear the Lord and entreat the favour of the Lord, and did not the Lord change his mind about the disaster that he had pronounced against them? But we are about to bring great disaster on ourselves!’>>.

Lean upon the Lord. Profession of faith without justice is lifeless: <<What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you? If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill’, and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead. But someone will say, ‘You have faith and I have works.’ Show me your faith without works, and I by my works will show you my faith>> (James 2:14-18).

No harm shall come upon us. There is no basis for their confidence that they will escape that which the Lord has appointed: <<*For the inhabitants of Maroth wait anxiously for good, yet disaster has come down from the Lord to the gate of Jerusalem*>> (Micah 1:12), and: <<*Therefore, thus says the Lord: Now, I am devising against this family an evil from which you cannot remove your necks; and you shall not walk haughtily, for it will be an evil time*>> (Micah 2:3).

¹² Therefore because of you
Zion shall be ploughed as a field;
Jerusalem shall become a heap of ruins,
and the mountain of the house a wooded height.

Micah 3:12

Therefore because of you. As the leaders had built Jerusalem with injustice and violent acts (v.10), so they are responsible for its ‘un-building.’

Zion shall be ploughed as a field; Jerusalem shall become a heap of ruins. This destruction did not come about in Micah’s day because King Hezekiah listened to him and destruction was averted. However, subsequent kings and priests did not obey God and judgement finally arrived with the Babylonians: <<*Look at the nations, and see! Be astonished! Be astounded! For a work is being done in your days that you would not believe if you were told. For I am rousing the Chaldeans, that fierce and impetuous nation, who march through the breadth of the earth to seize dwellings not their own*>> (Habakkuk 1:5-6).

After the people returned from Babylonian exile the temple was rebuilt according to the will of God and by command of King Cyrus of Persia: <<*He said to him, ‘Take these vessels; go and put them in the temple in Jerusalem, and let the house of God be rebuilt on its site’*>> (Ezra 5:15). Yet it was destined to be destroyed once more in AD 70 by the Romans as foretold by Jesus: <<*As Jesus came out of the temple and was going away, his disciples came to point out to him the buildings of the temple. Then he asked them, ‘You see all these, do you not? Truly I tell you, not one stone will be left here upon another; all will be thrown down’*>> (Matthew 24:1-2). Another prophet had posed a question long before, when the first temple was to be rebuilt: <<*But now, consider what will come to pass from this day on. Before a stone was placed upon a stone in the Lord’s temple*>> (Haggai 2:15). What came to pass was the rejection of the Messiah in his own house by his own people; the primary cause for the destruction of the second temple.

The mountain of the house. This sets up a contrast with <<*the mountain of the Lord’s house*>> in Micah 4:1. The temple without the Lord’s presence becomes simply a structure on a hill.