

Micah

Chapter 3

Rulers and Prophets Denounced

And I said: Hear, you heads of Jacob and rulers of the house of Israel! Is it not for you to know justice?—2 you who hate the good and love the evil, who tear the skin from off my people and their flesh from off their bones, 3 who eat the flesh of my people, and flay their skin from off them, and break their bones in pieces and chop them up like meat in a pot, like flesh in a cauldron. 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 made their deeds evil. 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 him who puts nothing into their mouths. 6 Therefore it shall be night to you, without vision, and darkness to you, without divination. The sun shall go down on 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. 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. 9 Hear this, you heads of the house of Jacob and rulers of the house of Israel, who detest justice and make crooked all that is straight, 10 who build Zion with blood and Jerusalem with iniquity. 11 Its heads give judgment for a bribe; its priests teach for a price; its prophets practice divination for money; yet they lean on the LORD and say, “Is not the LORD in the midst of us? No disaster shall come upon us.” 12 Therefore because of you Zion shall be plowed as a field; Jerusalem shall become a heap of ruins, and the mountain of the house a wooded height.

3:1–12 Verses 1–4 deal with the sins of the leaders of Israel, vv. 5–7 with the false prophets and vv. 9–12 with the leaders, priests and prophets. (CSB)

3:1 *heads ... rulers.* Micah addressed the legal officials who acted as judges at the city gates. (TLSB)

Jacob ... Israel. Both names refer to Judah here (see vv. 9–10). (CSB)

justice? Impartial judgment. The very people who had the responsibility to understand and execute the law were abusing their authority by oppressing the powerless. (TLSB)

3:2–3 *tear the skin from my people.* A series of figures of speech describing the cruel way the leaders treat the people. (CSB)

Violent and gruesome imagery is a vivid metaphor for the way judges abused their authority. In their greed, they were consuming their own people and destroying social harmony. (TLSB)

“Stripping off their skin” and tearing “the flesh from their bones” – that’s removing substance and shelter. Livelihood is destroyed when they break “their bones in pieces.” Finally, when they “chop them up like meat for the pan,” their helpless victims lost everything, except their trust in the Lord. God had called Israel’s leaders to be shepherds, caring for the special needs of His flock. At Micah’s time, Israel’s leaders were more like butchers, living off the flock. (PBC)

Dishonesty, fraud, extortion, threats, foreclosures, exorbitant interest, corrupt courts, outright violence – the ungodly rulers in Israel practiced them all. They distorted justice that they might fill their own pockets. What a contrast these leaders were to the self-sacrificing Good Shepherd. (PBC)

3:2 *hate good and love evil.* Contrast Am 5:15; Ro 12:9. (CSB)

Cf Am 5:14–15 for proper behavior of judges. (TLSB)

3:4 *they.* The leaders. (CSB)

Corrupt judges. (TLSB)

cry to the LORD. Pray for help esp in time of trouble (Ps 50:15; 107:13). (TLSB)

hide his face. See Dt 31:17; Isa 1:15 and note. Disobedience leads to separation from God. (CSB)

God would not look with favor on their pleas for deliverance. (TLSB)

Theirs would not be the cry of the penitent seeking forgiveness. They had showed no mercy toward their fellowmen; now they would receive none from the Lord. (PBC)

that time. Time of God’s judgment, when wicked leaders would experience God’s wrath. (TLSB)

3:5 *prophets.* False prophets misled the people by telling lies. (TLSB)

who cry ‘peace.’ The false prophets predicted peace for Judah while Micah predicted destruction and captivity. (CSB)

Jeremiah later voiced similar complaints about false prophets who promised peace (Jer 8:11). (TLSB)

That is, who, if they have anything to bite with their teeth, when they receive a sufficient amount of bribe money, proclaim peace, prophesying as it pleases the heart of men. (Kretzmann)

something to eat. False prophets’ message was based on how well the people fed them (v 11). (TLSB)

3:6 Those who abused their prophetic office would totally lose their ability and privilege to speak the true Word of the Lord. They would experience a blackout of God’s favor. (TLSB)

it shall be night – Four time, as if to emphasize this awful judgment, he uses similar expressions. All would be gone! The Lord Jesus described their loss this way, “Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him (Matthew 13:12). (PBC)

3:7 *seers.* An older term for “prophets.” (CSB)

Those who claimed to be able to predict the future. (TLSB)

Be disgraced on account of the fact that their predictions are not fulfilled. Blushing with shame on account of their miserable failures in trying to uncover the future. (Kretzmann)

cover their lips. Gesture of uncleanness and mourning (Ezk 24:17, 22). (TLSB)

Literally, "their beard," their face up to the nostrils, as a sign of shame. (Kretzmann)

no answer from God – He refuses to vouchsafe them any kind of information that might establish their false claims. (Kretzmann)

3:8 One of the chief purposes of Micah was to declare to Judah its sin. (CSB)

filled ... with the Spirit. The prophets were Spirit-filled messengers (see Isa 48:16). (CSB)

Micah, unlike the false prophets, was filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke a message that came from God. (TLSB)

The Spirit gave him “might,” the courage fearlessly to denounce the sins and transgressions of Israel, no matter what the consequences; the false prophets spoke only to satisfy the whims and fancies of the people. (PBC)

transgression ... sin. Micah’s message offered no false security to Jacob (Israel) but proclaimed God’s wrath and announced His justice. Luth: “He is boasting of his own power and boldness in the ministry of the Word which God has entrusted to him. It is as if he were saying: ‘Although all the princes and priests resist me, yet I go on preaching because I must. I do not forsake the established office of teaching, no matter how much their frenzy rages against me. I pay no attention I have started with God’s help, even if I am going to be killed, because by the efficacy of the Spirit of the Lord I am filled with both power and a sense of justice. This “sense of justice” is that I am sure that I am teaching correct things. Therefore, even if the enemies of the Word of God threaten me with death, I pay no attention to it. The Spirit of the Lord is with me. He enlivens and comforts me.’ Surely, to accuse so freely the princes and all those who are in positions of power and who rage against the truth is not characteristic of human boldness but of the boldness of the Spirit of the Lord” (AE 18:232). (TLSB)

3:9 *you heads* – The very leaders whose wickedness had been described in the first part of the chapter. (Kretzmann)

3:10 *build Zion with blood* – Caring only for gain and bloodshed in building their stately mansions, their wealth being obtained by the condemnation and murder of the innocent. (Kretzmann)

According to archaeological evidence, much building was going on in Jerusalem during Micah’s time. (TLSB)

blood ... iniquity. Parallel terms suggest oppressive practices such as forced labor and excessive taxes. (TLSB)

3:11 *heads ... money.* Judges, priests, and prophets abused their authority by giving false judgments, teachings, and oracles. They did this for personal gain, rather than carrying out their duties in the fear of the Lord and for the good of the people, esp for the protection of the needy in the land. (TLSB)

they lean on the LORD. Despite their wickedness, the leaders acted as though they relied on the Lord, claiming that His presence in their midst guaranteed their security. (TLSB)

for a bribe. See Isa 1:23; 5:23. (CSB)

Micah focused on the chief sin that was common to each of the three groups. Priests had been appointed by God to instruct the people in His Word without compensation. They were to receive their sustenance from portions assigned by the Lord (Deut 18:1-5). Yet, here they were teaching “for a price,” thereby losing their impartiality. (PBC)

3:12 The destruction of Jerusalem occurred in 586 B.C. This verse was quoted a century later in Jer 26:18. Jer 26:19 indicates that Micah’s preaching may have been instrumental in the revival under King Hezekiah (see 2Ki 18:1–6; 2Ch 29–31). (CSB)

Ground would go fallow after Babylonian forces conquered Judah and took its inhabitants into captivity. Micah’s words were quoted about a century later by defenders of the prophet Jeremiah, who argued that he should not be killed for what he had spoken against the temple (Jer 26:16–19). (TLSB)

Ch 3 The very people charged by God to administer justice, to give sound teaching, and to preach His Word are abusing their authority for personal gain. Micah proclaims that God will refuse to hear their cry for deliverance when judgment comes. If we abuse our authority as parents, employers, pastors, or teachers, we kindle God’s wrath and displeasure. When we serve our own interests at the expense of others, especially those who are powerless and needy, may we confess our sin and ask forgiveness. And as we have received God’s mercy in Christ, may we show mercy by looking after the interests of others (Php 2:1–7). • Lord Jesus, save me from serving only my own needs. Give me freedom to look to the interests of the poor, the sick, and the powerless. Amen (TLSB)