

5. How is this evidenced in the circumstances addressed by Micah?
6. How can a just God devise evil? (Micah 2:3)
7. What was the power by which the social leaders of Micah's day enforced their evil designs?
8. How does God's punishment predicted by Micah "fit the crime" of those He will punish? (Micah 2:5)
9. What is the relationship between the wickedness addressed by Micah and the false prophets of the day?
10. What part did national pride and racial arrogance play in the downfall of the wicked northern and southern kingdoms?
11. How does God's purpose in Israel rule out such pride and arrogance on the part of the faithful?
12. How do you answer the tendency to blame God for social calamities?
13. Discuss mistreatment of people as evidence of enmity with God.
14. What single fact made God's punishment of social sin in Israel and Judah necessary to the accomplishment of His purpose in the covenant?
15. What single characteristic of the Israelites during the Babylonian captivity stood out above all else?
16. Describe the kind of prophet the people desired in Micah's time. (Micah 2:11)
17. Discuss the problem of textual unity of the scriptures. (cf. Micah 2:12-13)
18. The idea of a restored remnant, as presented by Micah, presupposes the destruction of \_\_\_\_\_ and the rejection of the \_\_\_\_\_ *per se*.
19. The doctrine of election, divine choice, is, in the Bible, always related to the \_\_\_\_\_.
20. What is the similarity of modern denominationalism and the attitude of racial and national priority with God on the part of the Jewish people of Bible times?
21. Discuss the figures of the "shepherd," the "breaker," and the "king" in connection with the remnant.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THIRD CYCLE

#### OUTRAGES OF CIVIL OFFICIALS . . . Micah 3:1-4

RV . . . And I said, Hear, I pray you, ye heads of Jacob, and rulers of the house of Israel: is it not for you to know justice? ye who hate

the good, and love the evil; who pluck off their skin from off them, and their flesh from off their bones; who also eat the flesh of my people, and flay their skin from off them, and break their bones, and chop them in pieces, as for the pot, and as flesh within the caldron. Then shall they cry unto Jehovah, but he will not answer them; yea, he will hide his face from them at that time, according as they have wrought evil in their doings.

LXX . . . And he shall say, Hear now these words, ye heads of the house of Jacob, and ye remnant of the house of Israel; is it not for you to know judgement? who hate good, and seek evil; who tear their skins off them, and their flesh off their bones: even as they devoured the flesh of my people, and stripped their skins off them, and broke their bones, and divided them as flesh for the caldron, and as meat for the pot, thus they shall cry to the Lord, but he shall not hearken to them; and he shall turn away his face from them at that time, because they have done wickedly in their practices against themselves.

## COMMENTS

(Verse 1) Micah's concern for the return of the people to the covenant reaches its highest pitch in chapter three, as he pleads with the official leaders of the people. He has dealt in chapters one and two with the economic and social leaders of the northern and southern kingdoms. Now he turns his attention to the *official* leaders. He is acutely aware that no nation can rise any higher than the moral standards of its officials, especially of its courts.

Repeatedly Micah couches his appeal to people in high places in terms calculated to remind them that they are the temporal rulers of God's people. He addresses them as the "heads of Jacob" and "the rulers of the house of Israel." To these he addresses a warning of imminent doom, but with the underlying hope that they will repent.

The King James version has "princes" of the house of Israel in this verse. This is unfortunate, since it is generally agreed that this passage is intended for the magistrates and judges rather than for the royal family.

These are obviously not included in the remnant mentioned in the closing verses of chapter two. The prophets warning to them follows immediately the glowing hope expressed for the deliverance of the remnant so that they will make no mistake about their own predicament. They must not mistake themselves for inclusion in the

real Israel of God just because they sit in the seats of temporal judgment over the people.

"IS IT NOT FOR YOU . . ."

In *Micah 2:1-ff*, we saw Micah's denunciation of the wealthy and influential for their merciless mistreatment of the poor. The prophet now challenges the judges that they have the responsibility of preventing and dealing with such injustice. The wealthy could not do what they do were it not for corrupt courts. (See above on *Micah 1:5*) Magistrates and judges above all others should be aware of the penalties of wrong doing and injustice. Micah's warning is that the laws apply equally well to the lawyers.

"YOU WHO HATE GOOD AND LOVE EVIL". . . v. 2

These corrupt judges not only hate good men and love evil men, worse than that, they hate good as a principle and love evil as a principle.

Modern existential philosophy and situation ethics notwithstanding, there *is* such a thing as absolute good and absolute evil . . . as abstract reality as well as in tangible experience.

That the early church fathers believed this to be true is seen in such ancient writings as that attributed to Jerome, the translator of the Latin Vulgate, "It is sin not to love good; what guilt to hate it. It is faulty not to flee from evil, what ungodliness to love it."

"PLUCK OFF THEIR SKIN AND FLESH FROM THEIR  
BONES . . . v. 2(b)-3

Such allusions as this to describe the cheating advantage taken by one man over another are to be found in every culture. Examples of it in the historic writings of Israel are to be seen in such passages as *Psalms 14:4* and *Proverbs 30:14*. We still speak of such practices as "skinning" someone.

A proverb attributed to the American Indian says, "The Indian scalps his enemies, the white man skins his friends." It seems the white man cannot claim to be original in this maltreatment of his fellowman. The judges of Israel are warned here of the consequences of it.

This particular passage in Micah, denouncing the loving of evil and the hating of good brings to mind a very significant change in civilized man's evaluation of right and wrong. In 1867, Robert Milligan wrote, "It will, I presume, be generally conceded that the will of God

is the natural and only proper standard of all that is right. If God is our Sovereign King and Lawgiver, it is His right to command, and it is our duty to obey."

To this the Christian will readily say "amen!" To this also the ancient pagans would agree, although their confusion of deities could furnish no uniformly acceptable standard of right and wrong. To this even the evil doers addressed by Micah gave lip service, else the prophet could not have appealed to them on the ground of a clear cut distinction between good and evil.

We are something more than naive if we believe we can approach modern man, and especially the members of the intellectual and academic communities or young people on this basis today. Beginning with Hegel (1770-1831) through Kierkegaard (1813-1855) to the existential thinking of Karl Jaspers, Sartre, Camus, Julian and Aldous Huxley, *et al*, to the ultramodern (now passé) God-is-dead cult, twentieth century man has reached the rationale which says there not only *is not* but that there *cannot be* any absolute good or evil. Everything is relative. Absolutism is dead and man must decide in the context of a given set of circumstances the situation ethics of the moment.

To try to cut through such layers of ignorance by quoting the dictums of God from the Bible is to try to sweep back the tide with a broom. To give up in despair of being able to reach those who think like this is to abandon an entire generation, and possibly an entire civilization to spiritual darkness forever.

Somehow modern Christians must learn, as it is said the early Christians did, to "out-think, outlove and outdie" those whose spiritual eyes have been blinded by the self-acclaimed wisdom of men. The warnings of the prophets concerning the consequences of loving evil and hating good must be gotten through to modern man, but our task is twice as difficult as that of Micah and the others. They at least shared with those whom they sought to warn the common presupposition that there is a Sovereign God and His word determines the difference between objective good and objective evil. It is no longer so in our day. We share no such common ground with those whom we seek to turn from the error of their ways.

#### MERCENARY PROPHETS . . . Micah 3:5-8

RV . . . Thus saith Jehovah concerning the prophets that make my people to err; that bite with their teeth and cry, Peace; and whoso putteth not into their mouths, they even prepare war against him: therefore it shall be night unto you, that ye shall have no vision; and it

shall be dark unto you, that ye shall not divine; and the sun shall go down upon the prophets, and the day shall be black over them. And the seers shall be put to shame, and the diviners confounded; yea, they shall all cover their lips; for there is no answer of God. But as for me, I am full of power by the Spirit of Jehovah, and of judgement, and of might, to declare unto Jacob his transgression, and to Israel his sin.

LXX . . . Thus saith the Lord concerning the prophets that lead my people astray, that bite with their teeth, and proclaim peace to them; and when nothing was put into their mouth, they raised up war against them: therefore there shall be night to you instead of a vision, and there shall be to you darkness instead of prophecy; and the sun shall go down upon the prophets, and the day shall be dark upon them. And the seers of night-visions shall be ashamed, and the prophets shall be laughed to scorn: and all the people shall speak against them, because there shall be none to hearken to them. Surely I will strengthen myself with the Spirit of the Lord, and of judgment, and of power, to declare to Jacob his transgressions, and to Israel his sins.

### COMMENTS

As in the case of the arrogant misleaders (*Micah 2:1-3*) so with the unjust magistrates (*Micah 3:1-4*), the prophet relates their sin to false preachers.

(Verse 5) Here the accusation is direct. It is the false prophets who "make my people err." By not denouncing sin, the false prophet encourages his hearers to sin. By flattering sinners in their sin and telling them that God is not really all that demanding, the false preacher leaves the impression desired by his hearers. Namely, that sin will not really be punished.

When these false prophets do denounce some action or inaction in their hearers it is not because of the righteous demands of God but because they do not feel their salaries are big enough. This reveals them to be part of the total picture of a decadent social order. They are as mercenary as those who lay awake nights figuring how to cheat someone of his possessions.

The agreeableness of the message of a false prophet was determined by the size of the "bite" placed in his mouth by his hearers. When the "religious payola" was sufficient they foretold peace and prosperity. When it was not, they sanctified war as a judgement against those who failed to feed them. In such pronouncements they sounded like the true prophet, but they would change their "tune" when the

offerings were good. Such preaching is not calculated to bring about repentance on the part of the hearer.

(Verse 6) Micah's warning concerning such despicable practices on the part of those who claim to speak for God is that the light of God will be withheld from them. There will be no vision. The implication is clear, for where there is no vision, the people perish. (*Proverbs 29:18*)

The calamities which Micah has predicted for Israel and Judah will be shared by the false preachers as well as the social and official misleaders. When the calamity strikes they will no longer be able to claim to speak for God. When the judgements of God come, as they have promised His judgements will not come . . . when it is learned that God is not, after all, the tolerant benevolent benefactor the false teachers have made Him out to be, but rather the God of the covenant demanding faithful obedience to His will and His law, no one will listen any longer to those who made Him out to be what their hearers hoped He was.

(Verse 7) In that day of judgement, the false seers will be put to shame and confounded. Everything of which they have been warned will have come to pass . . . the laxity of judgement on the part of God which they have predicted will be shown for what it is . . . wishful thinking.

They will be put to shame. The covering of the lips may be explained in one of several figures. In the custom of the day, the moustache and beard were matters of great pride. The covering of them was an act expressing shame.

Another reference to the covering of the lips is found in *Leviticus 13:45*. There the command is that the leper is to "cover his upper lip and cry unclean unclean." This was one of the laws of God pertaining to hygiene. In *Micah 3:7* the implication seems to be that spiritual and moral infection being spread by the false prophet will finally be stopped when the calamity predicted by Micah finally stops their mouths.

In verse eight, Micah contrasts himself, as a true prophet to the false prophets he has just denounced. Three things characterize him. He has within himself the *POWER* of God's Spirit, without which no one can speak accurately and effectively concerning the will of God. (Cp. *Acts 1:5,8*)

He possesses *JUDGEMENT*, *ie.* a sense of justice which moves him to speak the truth no matter how unpopular as opposed to the false prophet whose motivation was money.

He possesses *MIGHT* or courage to say what needs saying in the face of ridicule and even persecution. (Cp. *II Timothy 1:7*)

He possesses these three graces "to declare unto Jacob his transgression, and unto Israel his sin." Jacob and Israel originally referred to the same individual. Jacob was his name before God confirmed to him the everlasting covenant. Israel was his covenant name. Micah apparently intends to distinguish here between the physical descendants of Jacob and the faithful covenant people among them to whom he refers by the covenant name, Israel.

Transgression is a specific term for the deliberate infraction of God's law. For these deliberate transgressions Micah has the power and the judgement and the might to speak out against those unfaithful to the covenant. Sin is a more general term. Even those who were faithful to the covenant were not free from sin completely. The prophet also has the power and the judgement and the might to speak to the covenant people whenever necessary.

One can scarcely read this denunciation of false and mercenary preachers without being aware of the present religious climate of our day. I have before me as I write the most recent publication of COCU (the Consultation On Church Unity). It is entitled *A Plan of Union*. Its authors make bold to claim that what they are doing in their eccumenical designs and ambitions is led by the Spirit of God. They claim the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit while they are denying the same to the writers of the Bible. They are teaching theology and proposing practices which are diametrically opposed to the Scriptural teaching and order of things in the church. One suspects their motivation, like that of those false prophets of whom Micah spoke, is something less than the selfless desire to see God's people do God's will.

One does not have to be a prophet of doom to foresee the possible collapse of our culture which is following the lead of such men. Just as those who misled the eighth century Jews into believing that God would not exact judgement against the followers of false teachers, so these twentieth century clergymen have denied the judgements of God. If our culture should collapse it will owe much of its failure to the teaching of these men. And, in that day as in the day of Judah's fall, the false prophet will be shown for what he is.

#### CONCLUSION OF THE DENUNCIATIONS . . . Micah 3:9-12

RV . . . Hear this, I pray you, ye heads of the house of Jacob, and rulers of the house of Israel, that abhor justice, and pervert all equity. They build up Zion with blood, and Jerusalem with iniquity. The heads

thereof judge for reward, and the priests thereof teach for hire, and the prophets thereof divine for money: yet they lean upon Jehovah, and say, Is not Jehovah in the midst of us? no evil shall come upon us. Therefore shall Zion for your sake be plowed as a field, and Jerusalem shall become heaps, and the mountain of the house as the high places of a forest.

LXX . . . Hear now these words, ye chiefs of the house of Jacob, and the remnant of the house of Israel, who hate judgment, and pervert all righteousness; who build up Sion with blood, and Jerusalem with iniquity. The heads thereof have judged for gifts, and the priests thereof have answered for hire, and her prophets have divined for silver: and yet they have rested on the Lord, saying, Is not the Lord among us? no evil shall come upon us. Therefore on your account Sion shall be ploughed as a field, and Jerusalem shall be as a storehouse of fruits, and the mountain of the house as a grove of the forest.

### COMMENTS

To this point, Micah has denounced specifically the wealthy whose wealth is gained by cheating the poor, the false prophet who preaches what his listeners want to hear while he ignores their sins, the judges who are unconcerned with justice and the political officials who, like their constituents, hate good and love evil. In this passage he summarizes and concludes the list of those whose greed for power and wealth, along with their unconcern for human misery have brought God's covenant nation to her downfall.

The list of their sins has an ominously familiar ring to anyone aware of the present spiritual condition of our own nation. They abhor justice and pervert all equity. They judge for reward, teach for hire and divine for money. And through it all they have the audacity to "lean upon Jehovah." Rather than repent and obey His laws, they presume to believe that they are yet His people, so that no evil can befall them.

False teaching is always recognizable by its emphasis on the goodness of God accompanied by the denial of His wrath . . . its proclamation of the promises of God while denying the condition of those promises. The preaching of such lies only makes the judgements of God the more certain.

(Verse 9) "Hear" is here resumed from verse one, indicating that Micah is about to sum up his denunciation of the evils of those who claim to be God's people.



The term "heads of Jacob" as in verse one calls attention to the civil rulers of the commonwealth, while "rulers of the house of Israel" here as there refers to the religious leaders. The sum of all of which he has accused them is that they "abhor justice and pervert all equity."

Pusey remarks concerning verse 9, "They abhorred judgement he says, as a thing loathsome and *abominable*, such as men cannot even bear to look upon; they not only dealt wrongly, but they *perverted*, distorted, all *equity* . . . whatever was right by conscience or by God's laws, they distorted, like the sophists making the worse appear the better cause."

A rather sadistic anecdote will illustrate how this attitude toward social justice is very much alive today. The story is told of two black men walking along a limited access highway in the deep south. A wealthy plantation owner's Cadillac struck them both, throwing one into a nearby cotton field and the other through the car's windshield and onto the back seat. A sheriff soon arrived on the scene and announced, "We'll charge one with leaving the scene of an accident and the other with breaking and entering." The humor of this story lies not in the judgement of the sheriff against the unfortunate blacks, but in the unlikely circumstances of the accident. Perversions of justice just as "far-fetched" are matters of court record throughout the United States. The reasons are the same as those which brought about the corruption of Micah's day.

(Verse 10) Maintaining his distinction between the civil and religious authorities, Micah accuses the latter of building up Zion with blood and the former of building up Jerusalem with iniquity.

Religion consisted of meticulously observing the formal sacrifices daily in the temple while ignoring the moral implications of the law, particularly the matter of human relations. The charge is reminiscent of that leveled against the religious leaders of first century Zion by Jesus, "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye tithe the mint and anise and cummin, and have left undone the weightier matters of the law, justice and mercy and faith; but these things ye should have done and not to have left the other undone." (*Matthew 23:23*) Both Micah and Jesus would have agreed with *Proverbs 15:8*, "The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to Jehovah . . ." The covenant purposes of God, symbolized here in the term Zion, cannot be built upon the blood of religious sacrifices offered by evil men.

We cannot but note in passing that one of the chief reasons for the disenchantment of modern man with the institutionalized church is that the religious people who are members of the churches have too

often failed to relate their duty to God to their duty to man and particularly to the social injustices exacted from the poor and the ignorant. It is easy to say that the purposes of God are redemptive rather than reformative . . . that the business of the church is to preach the gospel and win the lost, but it is not so easy to reach the lost whose stomach is empty because some influential member of the church has denied him work because of the color of his skin. It is easy to say the church's business is to proclaim the redemption of Christ to those outside the church, but it is not so easy to get the outsider to listen to a recital of his spiritual needs while we remain aloof and unconcerned for his physical needs. No doubt this is why Jesus' only detailed account of the judgement has to do with those who fed and visited and clothed the downtrodden in His name . . . or who while performing great religious works had failed to do so. (*Matthew 25:31-46*) In the prophecy of Micah, as well as that of the Lord, the punishment of such evil is severe and total.

Just as the religion of Zion was built upon the blood of mockingly meaningless sacrifices, so the political structure of Jerusalem's civil government was built upon social iniquity. Matthew Henry's comment here says it about as well as it can be said, "They pretend in justification of their extortion and oppressions, that they have built up Zion and Jerusalem: they add new streets and squares . . . and adorn them; they establish and advance the public interests both in church and state, and think therein they do God and Israel good service."

Could there be any more accurate illustration in an ancient writing of the social injustices of modern America? In the name of progress we move underprivileged people out of inadequate homes for which we pay them little or no remuneration to make way for our expressways and urban renewal projects . . . we exact exorbitant taxes to subsidize such urgent projects as the scientific study of earthworms while many who pay the taxes are forced to deprive their children of the necessities of life . . . the list of our iniquities is as long as that charged by Micah against the leaders of his society. We will be something less than wise if we fail to understand that the moral dry rot which destroyed Israel and Judah in the eighth and seventh century B.C. will also destroy ours in the 20th and 21st centuries A.D.

"HEADS . . . PRIESTS . . ." v. 11

Following still farther his denunciation of both the civil and religious leaders of the nation, Micah again accused the judges of being corrupt, deciding cases on the basis of bribes rather than justice.

To this charge, the prophet adds a new note. Heretofore, he has denounced the false prophet as representative of the corrupt religious system. Now he turns to the priest. The priest, he alleges, teaches for hire. The duty of the priest was to teach the law and decide controversy with justice. (*Leviticus 10:11, Deuteronomy 17:11*) Instead, these spiritual representatives of God among His people were emmeshed in the same materialism that polluted the rest of the upper classes of society.

Nor does Micah forget the false prophet in making this summary of his charges. He again asserts that the prophets preach only to fill their purses. They divine, that is they proclaim what they know the people want to hear as the will of God in order to receive pay.

And while they do this, they tell the people that God is among them, that the doom predicted by Micah and Isaiah and others cannot come to pass because they are, after all, the chosen people of God.

Such a claim brings up a rather moot question, very relevant in our day: Who is the real patriot? Who is really concerned for his country? The person who says "my country right or wrong" or the person who, like Micah, sees the faults of his homeland and sets about in the name of God to do something about those faults?

It should be apparent from the subsequent doom pronounced against Zion and Jerusalem, as well as from the testimony of more recent history, that God's relationship to the Jews as a race or as a nation is not unconditional. They have rejected Jehovah for Baal . . . they have abandoned spiritual justice for materialistic gain and fleshly pleasure. As their ancient uncle Esau, they have sold their birthright for a mess of pottage and so no longer have any claim to the promises of Jehovah!

"THEREFORE . . ." v. 12

In consequence of the sin of those in high places, the sacred mountain, Zion, is to be plowed as a field, and Jerusalem their capital is to be as any other high place in the forest. ("On the 6th September, A.D. 70, Jerusalem fell and the Romans destroyed it so completely that they drove a plough across the ruins. As a nation the Jews had come to an end; and their own mad folly had brought their end upon them." Barclay)

The kingdom is finished. The north will go first, the south will soon follow. And God will recall a remnant through whom to accomplish His promise ". . . in thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed." (*Genesis 12:3 (b)*)

One hundred years later another prophet, Jeremiah, would quote

these verses from Micah in defense of his own denunciations of an equally sinful generation. (*Jeremiah 26:18*)

## Chapter VIII—Questions

### Third Cycle

1. Discuss Micah's concern for the covenant in light of his plea in *Micah 3:1-4*.
2. Discuss the concept of absolute good and evil in contrast with modern situation ethics (new morality). *Micah 2:1-ff*
3. What is meant by "pluch off their skin and flesh from their bones (*Micah 2:2(b)-3*)?"
4. Discuss the will of God as "the only natural and proper standard of all that is right."
5. Discuss ways to penetrate the "layers of ignorance" in modern philosophies with the truth of God's sovereignty.
6. Are the prophetic warnings of the consequences of loving evil and hating good relevant to our current moral revolution?
7. What three classes of people does Micah denounce? (*Micah 2:1-3, 3:1-4, 3:5*)
8. What specific class of leaders are accused of making the people to err?
9. What seems to have been the chief concern of the false prophets?
10. What is God's warning to mercenary prophets?
11. Comment on the idea that God is a "tolerant benevolent benefactor."
12. What is to be the fate of the false prophets in the day of the judgement against the wicked nations as pronounced by Micah?
13. What three things characterize Micah as a true prophet as opposed to the false prophets?
14. Compare the false prophet syndrome of Micah's day with our present religious climate in America.
15. What is the relationship between false religious teaching and the cultural collapse of a civilization?
16. What are the specific sins with which Micah charges the wealthy, the false prophet, the magistrates, the political officials?
17. False teaching is always recognizable by its emphasis on the \_\_\_\_\_ of God accompanied by a denial of His \_\_\_\_\_.
18. The term "head of Jacob" calls attention to \_\_\_\_\_.
19. "Rulers of the house of Israel" refers to \_\_\_\_\_.