

Micah 2:1-5

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Micah describes the sins of wealthy people who constantly scheme new ways to cheat their fellow Judeans in order to enrich themselves.

In Chapter 1, Micah summoned the LORD's covenant people (Judah) to hear His judgment on them (Micah 1). In this chapter, he specified the reasons and justification for such a severe and devastating judgment.

It would be tempting to blame all of Judah's problems on the state of affairs in the Ancient Near East. Nineveh, the main city of the Assyrians, was expanding its empire throughout the region, conquering the Northern Kingdom of Israel in 722 BC, destroying its cities and killing/exiling its population (2 Kings 17:5-6, 24). Now, Assyria was in the process of doing the same to the Southern Kingdom of Judah (2 Kings 18:13).

But Micah placed the blame for this disaster squarely on the people of Judah. Specifically, he pronounced *woe to those who scheme iniquity* (v. 1). The term *woe* (Hebrew "hōy") was a term used by several Old Testament prophets to proclaim the coming of the LORD's judgment upon His sinful people (Isaiah 3:9; Jeremiah 13:27, Ezekiel 13:3; Amos 5:18 et al.).

This judgment would come *to those who scheme iniquity*. To *scheme* (Heb. "ḥōšābê") pictures someone weaving together various ideas about how to accomplish something. Here, the material being weaved together was *iniquity* (Heb. "ʿāwen"), a strong word indicating something very evil and wicked. This was not inadvertent, it was intentional.

The people who did this seemed to be obsessed with planning evil because they continued to *work out evil on their beds!* They spent night and day dreaming up ways to do evil things to others, then *when morning comes, they do it*. Notice that these people's only thoughts were how to enrich themselves. They paid absolutely no attention to the Law of Moses's instruction to love their neighbors as themselves (Leviticus 19:18). Rather, they had adopted the pagan culture of exploitation, and only thought continually of people to exploit.

Apparently, the people described here were in the upper class of society. They had power and influence in the society because, if they wanted something, *it is in the power of their hands* to get it without consequences. They could commit the evil they planned because they knew they could get away with it.

Earlier, Micah spoke in generic terms, referring to their "rebellion" and "sins" (1:5). Here, he focused on greedy landowners that wanted to enrich themselves regardless of who they hurt. Micah proclaimed *woe* to them because *they covet fields and then seize them* (v. 2). First of all, to *covet* (Heb. "ḥāmad") anything belonging to another person violated the tenth commandment (Exodus 20:17; Deuteronomy 5:21). Israel was breaking their covenant vow to obey God's

commands (Exodus 19:8). They not only coveted, they also seized, which violated their covenant contract provision not to take property from their neighbors (Exodus 20:15).

Here, they coveted *fields* belonging to someone else and then were able to *seize them*. At this time, a person's fields were their livelihood, and losing them forced the person into servitude. The word *seize* (Heb. "gāzal") literally means to "tear away" or "take away by force," implying that the seizing was forceful and maybe even violent.

Not only did these wealthy people ruin other people's livelihoods by taking their *fields*, they also wanted their *houses*, so they conspired to *take them* (homes) *away* as well. In other words, *they rob a man and his house*. The word for *rob* (Heb. "āshaq") literally means "to oppress," but it can mean "defraud," possibly with violence. The word *house* is a reference to all that a man possessed—his land, his residence, and his family. This would include *his inheritance*, the ability to pass on his possessions so that his family would not be in need.

What these oppressors were doing was in direct violation of the tenth commandment that says a person was prohibited from coveting "anything that belongs to your neighbor" (Deuteronomy 5:21). In fact, they needed to seek the best for their neighbor and "love your neighbor as yourself" (Leviticus 19:18).

In the New Testament, Jesus repeats this commandment, telling His people to "love your neighbor" (Matthew 5:43; 19:19). He even told His followers to "love your enemies" (Matthew 5:44). Paul and James applied this to the Church (Romans 13:9; Galatians 5:14; James 2:8). Paul extends this concept by saying "regard one another as more important than yourself" (Philippians 2:3). This is the road to experiencing the greatest fulfillment of life, to love and serve others (Deuteronomy 30:11-16).

Having described how these powerful people oppress others, Micah now told of the LORD's reaction. The phrase *Therefore thus says the Lord* (v. 3) shows that what followed were not Micah's words—they were from the LORD (Yahweh) Himself.

The LORD responded to the widespread sins and injustices described in vv. 1 – 2 with His proclamation of judgment. He emphasized the seriousness of what He was about to say by starting with the word *behold* (Heb. "hinnêh," "Look!"). The LORD declared that He was *planning against this family a calamity* (or "disaster") *From which you cannot remove your necks* (vs 3). The *family* (all Israelites) was going to receive a judgment which was unavoidable.

As a result of the calamity, the judged evildoers (v. 1f) *will not walk haughtily*. This infers that prior to the *calamity*, the wealthy of Judah operated out of considerable pride. The Bible poses pride as the opposite of faith (Habakkuk 2:4). We tend to either have faith in God, and follow His ways, or we have faith in ourselves, that we know best (pride). Pride is, therefore, rooted in a false reality. The calamity will take care of the illusion that "I am in control" which Judah apparently suffered from. There will be nothing to celebrate or brag about *for it will be an evil time*, a time of suffering and great loss.

Verse 4 is in the form of a lament song. It says *on that day they will take up against you a taunt* (v. 4). The phrase *on that day* refers to the “calamity” that the LORD has designed for them (see v. 3). The calamity referred to could be the taking of most of Judah by the Assyrians (2 Kings 18:13). It could also refer to the future conquering and taking into captivity of Judah by Babylon, in 586 BC.

The *you* here refers to the object of the *woe* in v. 1 – the false prophets and greedy wealthy people that were *devising evil*. The *taunt* would contain a *bitter lamentation*, an intense expression (lit. “one will lament with great lamentation”) referring to a song filled with wailing and mourning and overwhelming grief.

The reason for the taunt song was that everything would be taken away from the people, even the false prophets and the wealthy landowners. They cried out *We are completely destroyed!* The *we* here probably refers to the wealthy landowners who had taken away land from the poor (see v. 2). Now all of their land was going to be taken away by the invader. This outcome was pursuant to the covenant/treaty Israel had entered into with their Suzerain/ruler God, Yahweh. According to the treaty, if they disobeyed and exploited rather than loved their neighbors, they would then be turned over to foreign nations to be exploited (Deuteronomy 28:33, 49). The time had come for that part of the treaty to be enforced.

The evil people (false prophets and the greedy wealthy landowners) then cry out that *He exchanges the portion*. This means that the LORD will change the ownership of the *portion* (Heb. “*hêleq*”, referring to a plot of farmland or pastureland essential for life) *of my people*. These powerful, sinful people will lose their land to the invaders.

The principle of reciprocity runs throughout scripture. It seems that small acts of kindness will be greatly rewarded by God (Matthew 10:40-42). It is also the case that when we refuse to forgive, we will not be forgiven (Matthew 6:14). And when we sin deliberately, God turns us over to suffer the negative consequences of our actions (Romans 1:24, 26, 28). Here, those who used their influence and power to exploit are being turned over to someone with even greater power, to be exploited.

They shouted their amazement at *how He (the LORD) removes it from me!* The word *remove* (Heb. “*yāmîš*”) might be used here in a covenant sense as it is in Isaiah 54:10. It probably means that, from the viewpoint of the false prophets, the LORD was not faithful to His own covenant. In other words, in their opinion, the LORD was not remaining true to the covenant by taking this land (Judah) away that earlier had been promised to be a permanent possession of His people (Deuteronomy 1:8).

However, the people were picking and choosing the parts of the covenant/treaty to focus upon. For it is clearly stated in the treaty that if they exploited rather than loved their neighbors (adopting the pagan culture of exploitation rather than the self-governing culture of loving their neighbors) then they would suffer a series of curses (Deuteronomy 28:15-68). This indicates that Israel was breaking the first and greatest command as well as the second; they were not listening to God, or following Him with all their hearts (Matthew 22:37-39). They were, instead, seeking to exploit God for their own ends.

The situation was even more disheartening to these sinful people because it was *to the apostate He apportions our fields*. The word *apostate* (Heb. “lǎšōwḅêḅ”) means “one who turns away” or “backslider.” It is probably a reference to the Assyrian invaders (722 BC – 701 BC) or perhaps the Babylonians who come later (605 BC – 586 BC). The irony here is that they (evil Israelites) were the “backsliders” (along with the Assyrians) because they had turned away from obeying the LORD’s covenant.

In response to the lament of the false prophets in the preceding verses, Micah then proclaimed that as a result of their apostasy, they *will have no one stretching a measuring line For you by lot in the assembly of the Lord* (vs 5). To *stretch a measuring line* refers to defining the borders of a person’s property. Because of their disregard for the LORD’s law, they will have no property of their own. This also infers they will have no government of their own. Instead, they will be vassals of a foreign state. This ultimately came to be for Judah after they were invaded and exiled by Babylon (2 Kings 25:1-4).

Biblical Text

**1 Woe to those who scheme iniquity,
Who work out evil on their beds!
When morning comes, they do it,
For it is in the power of their hands.**

**2 They covet fields and then seize *them*,
And houses, and take *them* away.
They rob a man and his house,
A man and his inheritance.**

**3 Therefore thus says the Lord,
“Behold, I am planning against this family a calamity
From which you cannot remove your necks;
And you will not walk haughtily,
For it will be an evil time.**

**4 “On that day they will take up against you a taunt
And utter a bitter lamentation *and* say,
‘We are completely destroyed!
He exchanges the portion of my people;
How He removes it from me!
To the apostate He apportions our fields.’**

**5 “Therefore you will have no one stretching a measuring line
For you by lot in the assembly of the Lord.**