

Micah 3:1-4

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/mic/mic-3/micah-31-4/>

Micah calls on Israel's civil leaders to listen to his description of their sins.

Micah began this oracle with a short introduction—*And I said* (v. 1). This phrase provided both a continuation with the first oracle and a distinction between the two oracles.

Similar to the first and third oracles, this oracle begins with the summons to *Hear*. In this oracle, it was directed toward the *leaders of Jacob And rulers of the house of Israel*. Both the *leaders* and its parallel term *rulers* refer to the government officials that ruled *Jacob* and *Israel*, referring to all twelve tribes. This would include the northern kingdom of Israel, whose capital was Samaria, as well as the southern kingdom of Judah, whose capital was Jerusalem.

Micah then asked these leaders a rhetorical question—*Is it not for you to know justice?* Here, the word *know* (i.e. “practice”) contains a bit of sarcasm. Of course, these government officials “knew” what comprised *justice* in light of the Mosaic Law—they simply chose not to practice it.

Justice refers to the application of equity and fairness to all people without any bias or self-interest. This was a core tenant of God's covenant/treaty with Israel (Deuteronomy 1:17). God's covenant stipulated that Israel would experience great blessing if they would build and follow a culture of self-governance, based on loving one another as they loved themselves (Leviticus 19:18). Micah was confronting these leaders to put into practice what they know is justice, and follow the commands in His covenant/treaty, which they had agreed to follow (Exodus 19:8).

But these rulers did the opposite of justice. In vv. 2 – 3, Micah gave a graphic description of how these civic leaders operated during his time. Instead of practicing justice, he accused them of the following:

- First, they were ones *who hate good and love evil* (v. 2), just the opposite of how they were supposed to behave (Amos 5:15).
- Instead of treating people as those created as the image of God (Genesis 1:27; 9:6), the leaders considered themselves hunters and their victims (ordinary citizens) prey to be hunted down. Rather than using their authority to serve, they used it to exploit.

In vividly graphic language, Micah described what these “hunters” (the leaders) did with their “prey.”

- They *tear off their skin from them And their flesh from their bones* in preparation for cooking.
- They act like cannibals when they *eat the flesh of my people* (v. 3).
- They *strip off their skin from them, Break their bones* in preparation for cooking their prey.

- Finally, they *chop them up as for the pot, And as meat in a kettle*. The picture of the cannibal's meal was complete.

Micah used this gruesome picture to communicate how the wealthy leaders were stripping the poor of their money and property. The poor were devastated by their evil rulers whose only motivation was self-enrichment.

These leaders should have been acting like compassionate shepherds, protecting and providing for their flocks (Deuteronomy 16:18-20). Instead, they behaved like cannibalistic predators who kill, dismember, and consume their prey. Rather than build and serve a love-your-neighbor culture, Judah's leaders were building and following a pagan exploit-the-weak culture, like the surrounding nations. Accordingly, they were failing to lead Israel to accomplish its assigned duty to be an example to the surrounding nations, to lead them to a better way, a way of self-governance and love of neighbor (Exodus 19:6).

At some time in the future, these leaders will incur the LORD's judgment. They would then *cry out to the LORD* (v. 4). He would, of course, hear their pleadings for deliverance, but because they did not repent from their crimes, *He will not answer them*. In fact, He would *hide His face from them at that time*.

For the LORD to *hide His face* means that He will turn His back on them and they will not receive His blessings. They chose to exploit others, so they will experience being exploited. This follows the biblical principle that what we do to others will be done to us (Matthew 7:2).

This is a good example of what is called "lex talionis," which means that the punishment for an evil deed must correspond in kind and intensity. This is the idea behind the Mosaic law stating "eye for an eye" (Exodus 21:23 – 25). God's purpose of this law was to limit the punishment to the severity of the crime. It does however underscore that God built cause-effect into the moral universe just as He did the physical universe. Moral decisions have consequences, and God's judgment is often to simply allow cause-effect to run its course (Romans 1:24, 26, 28).

In this case, because the evil leaders refused to respond to the cries for help by their poor victims, the LORD would ignore the leaders' cries for deliverance *because they have practiced evil deeds*.

Biblical Text

**And I said,
 "Hear now, heads of Jacob
 And rulers of the house of Israel.
 Is it not for you to know justice?
² "You who hate good and love evil,
 Who tear off their skin from them
 And their flesh from their bones,
³ Who eat the flesh of my people,
 Strip off their skin from them,**

**Break their bones
And chop *them* up as for the pot
And as meat in a kettle.”
⁴Then they will cry out to the Lord,
But He will not answer them.
Instead, He will hide His face from them at that time
Because they have practiced evil deeds.**