

Micah 3:5-8

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Micah declared an oracle of judgment against the religious leaders of Israel whose teaching justified the evil done by wealthy land barons.

After dealing with the greedy civic leaders of Judah (Micah 3:1-4), Micah then proclaimed the LORD's judgment on the religious leaders (the false prophets) of his day. They taught doctrines that were either direct contradictions of the Law of Moses or perversions of it.

Micah introduced this oracle by stating that *Thus says the LORD concerning the prophets who lead my people astray* (v. 5). Instead of warning the people of the LORD's imminent judgment upon their sin and rebellion, *the prophets lead them astray*. The word *astray* (Hebrew "hammat'îm") literally means "to cause to err" or "to cause to wander." It is used in a physical sense (Genesis 21:14) and in a moral sense (Psalm 95:10; Isaiah 53:6). Here, it refers to the moral and spiritual errors done by the people.

The message that the false *prophets* proclaimed seem to depend on what they were paid. For *when they have something to bite with their teeth, They cry, "Peace!"* The phrase *bite with their teeth* probably refers to food (probably an idiom for money and other goods) that was given to the prophet as payment for a positive message (what the person wanted to hear).

The Apostle Paul warned that in the last days, this same phenomenon will be the norm, where those who ought to be proclaiming God's truth will instead be tickling the ears of their listeners, telling them what they want to hear (2 Timothy 4:3-4). This will be because the hearers seek out and reward these teachers for telling them what they desire to hear.

On the other hand, *against him who puts nothing in their mouths They declare holy war*. That is, if someone could not afford to pay the prophet a fee, the prophet would give them a message of doom and destruction. They would declare *holy war* (literally "consecrate a war upon them").

Apparently, these prophets were motivated by the money they could receive for their services. They really did not give any interest in what the LORD wanted them to say. They used His name to give their prophecies credibility, but in reality, they only cared for their own welfare, not the welfare of the people or the nation. Therefore, like the civic leaders, they were not serving others with their gifts and position. Rather, they were using their position to exploit. So, like the civic leaders, the prophets were violating their covenant/treaty with God, which required that they love and serve their neighbor (Leviticus 19:18).

In response to the corrupt practices of the false prophets, the LORD told them that He would put them to shame by causing it to be *night for you* (v. 6). Not only would the sun set on their careers as prophets, it would be a time *without vision*. Since visions often come at night (Genesis 46:2; Job 4:13; Daniel 2:19; Acts 16:9), this could mean that their nights would remain dark and

visionless all night, every night. The idea seems to be that God would stop sending prophets to Israel. Since the people don't want to hear the truth, God will stop sending prophets.

So, there would be *darkness* for the false prophets. They would be *without divination*. The use of *divination* (Heb. "miqqāsōm") was an occult practice designed to obtain knowledge of the future. Today, it might be called fortune-telling. Divination was forbidden in the Law of Moses (Leviticus 19:26; Deuteronomy 18:10). Apparently the false prophets were selling good news about the future for anyone willing to pay. God would shut this practice down. Perhaps in addition to ceasing speaking through prophets, part of this was by eliminating the people's ability to pay fees to the prophets; Judah will soon be destitute when their country is ravaged by Babylon.

The LORD's judgment continued by stating that *the sun will go down on the prophets, And the day will become dark over them*. This pictures again the fact that *the prophets* would not receive any revelations whatsoever. They enriched themselves using these revelations, but now they would live in darkness, with no revelation. This probably includes the idea that God will stop sending prophets to Israel, as they refused to listen. In fact, after Malachi, in the roughly 400 years between Malachi and the advent of Jesus, no God-inspired prophetic word was added to scripture (the Bible we know today).

The result of this constant darkness, this absence of revelation from God, would be that *the seers will be ashamed, And the diviners will be embarrassed* (v. 7). Both the *seers* and the *diviners* would be put to shame *because there is no answer from God*. They could no longer produce what they promised because God did not respond to them. God would stop speaking through prophets.

As a result of the loss of their prophetic careers, *indeed, they will all cover their mouths*. Covering one's mouth (lit., "mustache") was a sign of mourning (Leviticus 13:45; Ezekiel 24:17). They mourned the loss of their careers and the resulting prosperity. And what caused their loss was that *there is no answer from God*. It is ironic that the false prophets had to hide their face from the people because the LORD had hidden His face from them (see v. 4).

Micah then began his contrast between himself, a true prophet, and the false prophets by using the strong adversative: *on the other hand* (v. 8). This phrase (Heb. "wə'ūlām") is often translated "but." Here, it emphasizes the stark contrast between the false prophets and Micah.

Micah declared that he was *filled with power*; in other words, *with the Spirit of the Lord* (vs 8). Micah was able to speak to the people because of the Spirit's presence within him. He was committed to proclaiming God's word—the false prophets were motivated by greed. Micah was honoring God's law by loving and following God, which is the first and greatest command (Deuteronomy 6:5, Matthew 22:37). The false prophets were walking in the pagan ways of self-serving and exploitation (Leviticus 18).

Micah was given the ability to speak to the people *with justice and courage* by the LORD's Spirit within him. The word *justice* (Heb. "mišpāṭ") refers both to fair treatment in the legal system and to the true basis of the Law of Moses when dealing with fellow Israelites

(Deuteronomy 1:17; 16:18-20). It is a companion to the word “righteousness.” Both refer to things aligning with God’s design, such that the world operates in harmony with His design for goodness and benefit to His creation.

The word *courage* (Heb. “gəḇūrāh”) in the phrase *justice and courage* refers to having the strength and courage of a mighty warrior. The *Spirit* of the LORD gave Micah the strength and courage to deliver the LORD’s message in truth, in spite of the danger of ridicule, persecution, and even death at the hands of his opposition.

Believers in Christ have been given the same Spirit to proclaim the Good News and minister to one another (2 Timothy 1:7). Jesus’s revelation to His people asserts that He will give a great blessing to those who have the *courage* to “overcome” rejection, loss, and even death, as He overcame (Revelation 1:1-3, 3:21). Micah is an example of one who was a faithful witness, in spite of difficulty.

Micah’s message was in stark contrast to that of the false prophets. Instead of proclaiming that everything was fine, he was to *make known to Jacob his rebellious act, Even to Israel his sin* (vs 8). The false prophets proclaimed guaranteed success and prosperity regardless of the actions of the people—Micah exposed their horrible behavior as acts of rebellion against the LORD. Micah preached the truth, that God would honor His covenant/treaty with Israel, and invoke the provisions of judgment for their disobedience (Deuteronomy 28:15-68).

The New Testament Church is not exempt from false teaching. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus corrected the teaching of the Jewish leaders on several subjects (Matthew 5:22, 28, 32, 34). False teachers will plague the Church in the last days (2 Thessalonians 2:2 – 5, 15).

Biblical Text

**⁵ Thus says the Lord concerning the prophets who lead my people astray;
When they have *something* to bite with their teeth,
They cry, “Peace,”
But against him who puts nothing in their mouths
They declare holy war.**

**⁶ Therefore *it will be* night for you—without vision,
And darkness for you—without divination.
The sun will go down on the prophets,
And the day will become dark over them.**

**⁷ The seers will be ashamed
And the diviners will be embarrassed.
Indeed, they will all cover *their* mouths
Because there is no answer from God.**

**⁸ On the other hand I am filled with power—
With the Spirit of the Lord—
And with justice and courage
To make known to Jacob his rebellious act,
Even to Israel his sin.**