

Micah 3:9-12

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Micah confronted Israel's leaders with the judgments that will come upon Israel as a consequence of their sin.

Micah, filled with the Spirit of the LORD (cf. v. 8), then commanded *Now hear this, heads of the house of Jacob And rulers of the house of Israel* (v. 9). The *heads* and *rulers* were the political leaders of the nation. Though tasked with protecting and providing for the citizens under their rule, they instead *abhor justice*. These *heads* and *rulers* might include the civic leaders Micah addressed in verses 1-4 and the religious leaders he addressed in verses 5-8.

The word *abhor* (Heb. “hamāṭa‘ābîm”) is a strong word suggesting that these leaders thought that *justice* (the system of law) was repulsive and an abomination. This is likely because God's covenant/treaty required that the leaders serve the people, and execute justice without partiality (Deuteronomy 1:17, 16:18-20). This idea was odious to them, because it affected their prestige, their preference to lord over others, and their moral justification to exploit others, for their own pleasure and profit (Micah 3:2-3).

As a result of their choice to exploit others, they *twist everything that is straight*. This would indicate that they were rationalizing their immoral behavior by twisting the truth, and claiming their behavior was moral. The word *twist* (Heb. “yā‘aqqêšū”) means “to distort” or “to pervert.” The leaders of Israel would twist the law to say anything they wanted in order to justify their exploitation of others, and profit from it. They had no respect for any law, especially the Law of God given to Moses and the Israelites.

They also had no respect (or love) for their fellow Israelites either. They only loved themselves. Accordingly, they were violating the two commandments upon which hang all the law and prophets (Matthew 22:37-40). Thus, they were leading by example, and causing their land to violate their covenant/treaty with God. That would lead to severe consequences, as set forth in the treaty (Deuteronomy 28:15-68).

The result of their perversion of justice was that they *build Zion with bloodshed* (v. 10). The word *Zion* in the phrase *build Zion* likely refers to Jerusalem. Mount Zion is one of the hills upon which Jerusalem sits, and is often used as a synonym for the city. The implication of the *phrase build Zion with bloodshed* is that the leaders performed their duties in such a way that they destroyed the lives of innocent people. Apparently they justified such injustice by saying “it is good for the city.”

This probably included murder on occasion as seen in the next line where they plagued *Jerusalem with violent injustice*. *Zion* and *Jerusalem* are used as synonyms here to refer to the legal and spiritual center of Israel. It might well have been that these leaders rationalized that oppressing the people would *build Zion* because it elevated them and their power: “We must be

in control, for that is Jerusalem's greatest good." This is the same basic rationale Judah's leaders gave as a reason for killing Jesus (John 11:47-50).

In verse 11, Micah narrows the discussion to Jerusalem. He described *her leaders* (same word as in v. 8) as those who *pronounce judgment for a bribe* (v. 11). These *leaders* (acting as judges) would pronounce a favorable verdict to the one who gave a *bribe*. Bribery was a violation of the LORD's commandment in Deuteronomy 16:19. Again, the leaders were not leading Judah to walk in God's ways, and experience His blessings (Deuteronomy 28:1-14). Instead, they were leading their nation to violate God's covenant/treaty with them, which would cause the enforcement provisions for non-compliance to be invoked (Deuteronomy 28:15-68).

The spiritual leaders were just as corrupt as the civic leaders—*her priests instruct for a price*. The *priests* were responsible for leading the people in the worship of the covenant LORD in the temple (Deuteronomy 18:1 – 5; 26:1 – 4) and teaching them to obey His Law (Numbers 3:3; Deuteronomy 24:8). They were not to charge for their service; instead they were to rely upon the freewill offerings of the people (Deuteronomy 10:9).

It is ironic (and sad) that those who were the spiritual leaders of the people performed their duties only for the pay they would receive. Unfortunately, this is a reflection of the fallen human nature (Romans 7:15-18). It has persisted through time, and will until the end of the age (Philippians 1:15; 2 Timothy 4:3-4). But God will greatly reward those who serve Him as faithful witnesses (Revelation 3:21).

Micah also said that *her prophets divine for money* (vs 11). The prophets were assigned to proclaim the word that the LORD revealed to them (Deuteronomy 34:10; Judges 6:8; Jeremiah 1:5 – 7). These *prophets*, however, like the leaders and priests, prophesied solely *for money*. As described in v. 6, they would use divination (an occult practice) to try to get the LORD's revealed word and make a favorable prophecy to those who would pay for it. In doing this, they were following the sin of Balaam, which was condemned by the Apostle Peter centuries after the oracles of the prophet Micah (2 Peter 2:15).

These civil and religious leaders claimed that *they lean on* (or "rely upon") *the Lord*. This means that they would mention the LORD's name in order to give credibility to their prophecies. Their message proclaimed, "*Is not the Lord in our midst?*" The expected answer to this rhetorical question is "yes." This part of their statement is true. The LORD promised His constant presence with His covenant people Israel (Deuteronomy 2:7; 20:1; Isaiah 41:10).

But the second part of their statement was false. They taught that *calamity will not come upon us* (vs 11). The word *calamity* (Heb. "rā'āh") is normally translated "evil," but it can also be thought of as "misery," "misfortune," or "distress." They taught this because, while they accepted the promises of the LORD's everlasting presence, they had forgotten (or rejected) the teaching that the LORD required that His people obey His commandments found in His covenant (Deuteronomy 13:4; 28:1). They refused to acknowledge that the moral choices of the people would have moral consequences.

By neglecting the moral teachings of the covenant, the leaders taught that their obedience was not necessary or important to the LORD. Or, worse, they justified disobedience as obedience, twisting God's law (Micah 3:9b). Therefore, they claimed that on account of God's presence with them, no harm could come to them. The idea seems to be "God is on our side, so we are safe from any other nations." They refused to honor the provision of their covenant/treaty with God that states directly that God would turn them over to foreign nations if they disobeyed His commands to treat one another justly and with love (Deuteronomy 28:49-50).

In contrast to the evil teachings and actions of the civil and spiritual leaders, Micah predicted that judgment was imminent. He started his statement with *Therefore* (v. 12), connecting what was about to happen with the sinful actions of the civic and religious leaders of Judah (see vv. 10-11). Indeed, He made it clear to them that the calamity described in this verse was *on account of you*. Their false teaching in and unjust treatment of the LORD's covenant people would be the cause of their doom.

Micah then described what the LORD was going to do. He said that *Zion will be plowed as a field* (vs 12). Zion refers to Mount Zion, including the temple, the holy place (Psalm 2:6; 76:2), Jerusalem, and the surrounding area. Instead of a lively city that was the center of worship of the LORD, the Chaldeans (Babylonians) would turn the whole area into an empty field. This indicates that Judah's people will be exiled.

Also, the city of *Jerusalem will become a heap of ruins*. The city streets, once bustling with activity, would be turned into a pile of rocks. This included the temple, the place where the LORD dwelt among His people (Psalm 9:11). This indicates that Judah will be invaded, and Jerusalem put under siege and destroyed. This took place when the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem and exiled its people (2 Kings 25:9-12).

Finally, Micah stated that *the mountain of the temple will become high places of a forest*. This means that the most holy place in Israel would become overgrown with trees and other plant life. The only occupants of this *forest* would be animals, some of them dangerous (Jeremiah 5:6). This is because Jerusalem would be left desolate (2 Kings 25:12).

The fulfillment of this prophecy concerning the destruction of Jerusalem occurred first in 586 BC by the Chaldeans (Babylonians). It was destroyed again by the Romans in 70 AD.

Biblical Text

**⁹Now hear this, heads of the house of Jacob
And rulers of the house of Israel,
Who abhor justice
And twist everything that is straight,
¹⁰ Who build Zion with bloodshed
And Jerusalem with violent injustice.
¹¹ Her leaders pronounce judgment for a bribe,
Her priests instruct for a price
And her prophets divine for money.**

**Yet they lean on the Lord saying,
“Is not the Lord in our midst?
Calamity will not come upon us.”
¹² Therefore, on account of you
Zion will be plowed as a field,
Jerusalem will become a heap of ruins,
And the mountain of the temple *will become* high places of a forest.**