

When The Leadership Is Corrupted

I. A Leadership Problem

And I said:

Hear, you heads of Jacob and rulers of the house of Israel! Is it not for you to know justice?—² you who hate the good and love the evil, who tear the skin from off my people and their flesh from off their bones, ³ who eat the flesh of my people, and flay their skin from off them, and break their bones in pieces and chop them up like meat in a pot, like flesh in a cauldron. (Micah 3:1-3)

Chapter three is a message to the leaders. We won't break this chapter down verse by verse, but there are some interesting points to study.

A. Corrupt leaders who commit heinous acts of human oppression

First, God holds leaders especially responsible for their influence. And it is because God holds leadership to such a level of responsible that the prophet speaks the words of the Lord with such intensity.

Keep in mind that Micah is addressing the leadership, and at this time the king of Judah was Hezekiah. The rest of the "leadership" under the king included the political and civic leaders in the kingdom such as judges, clan elders, and military leaders. We just can't ignore the descriptive language Micah uses to address the corrupt leaders in Judah and Israel. They are deeply responsible for the condition of these kingdoms. Corrupt leadership is the fountainhead of the wickedness.

The unknown, obscure prophet comes out of a tiny village in the south and speaks to all the powerful leaders, especially including the king, in such scathing tones. Can you grasp the measure of boldness it took for the prophet to dress the king down like this? Micah uses two metaphors back to back to describe how God evaluates Hezekiah and his policies and the practices of all the leaders in the kingdom. At first, Micah uses a metaphor of vicious predators, accusing the leaders of tearing the skin off people, ripping the flesh off their bones, and even breaking the bones like ravaging animals would do to a prey. Then he switches an even more gruesome metaphor of cannibalism, chopping the people up and throwing the pieces in a pot for human stew. This might be the understatement of the year, but I don't think this is what leadership is supposed to do.

B. The Great Awakening

⁴ Then they will cry to the Lord, but he will not answer them; he will hide his face from them at that time, because they have made their deeds evil. (verse 5)

C. Prophets for Profit

The interesting thing about these "prophets" Micah confronts—they are not pagans and they are not pointing people to idolatry. They are endeavoring to act as true messengers between Jehovah and the people. But Micah pinpoints their glaring flaw in verse 11.

[Judah's leaders] give judgment for a bribe; its priests teach for a price; its prophets practice divination for money". (3:11)

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In this particular instance, the problem is deeper than merely receiving financial report as priests. It appears the donation directly influenced the quality of the prophecy. If you had nothing to give, you got nothing in return. If you were a big donor, you got favorable prophecies of blessings and peace. If you insulted the prophet with a miserly gift, you may get a prophecy of doom and judgment.

Money corrupts so easily. Do not think for one minute we don't have a similar problem in 21st century America. It is here and it is an abomination to the Lord.

First, we have preachers hesitate to preach the truth because it may offend some of the deep pockets in the church. They preach comforting words to keep the money rolling in. Second, we have ministers—pastors and evangelists alike—who are fleecing the flock for their own benefit. Those who purport themselves to be ministers of the gospel should not be flying around in 50 million dollar jets and living in multiple million dollar mansions around the world, or even wearing Nike Air Yeezy 2 Red October hightops that cost over \$5000 a pair. These are the modern day equivalents to the people Micah rebuked. We cannot cheer Micah on for taking on the corruption in his religion in his day, if we aren't willing to take a stand against the same kind of corruption today. I borrow loosely from the words of one commentator, "This is the prostitution of the pulpit." Does God really honor the prayers of these people? Do you really believe they are hearing from God when they pretend, "God told me"? They are peddling a religion without a relationship anchored in God.

D. False Sense of Security

¹¹ [Judah's leaders] give judgment for a bribe; its priests teach for a price; its prophets practice divination for money; yet they lean on the LORD and say, "Is not the LORD in the midst of us? No disaster shall come upon us."

These people are self-deluded. They think God is still in their camp. They think His hand of protection is upon them. Considering depth of their depravity exposed by Micah, it is baffling to think they could be so corrupt and still think they are tight with God. Micah wasn't the only one to see this glaring problem. Amos accused them of trusting in the size of their own nation, trusting in their wealth, trusting their military conquests. They kept going back to the time God delivered them out of Egypt, and thinking He would always be there to do the same for them again and again.

One hundred years later, Jeremiah was preaching the same message:

⁹ "Will you steal and murder, commit adultery and perjury, burn incense to Baal and follow other gods you have not known, ¹⁰ and then come and stand before me in this house, which bears my Name, and say, "We are safe"—safe to do all these detestable things? ¹¹ Has this house, which bears my Name, become a den of robbers to you? But I have been watching! declares the Lord.

Such delusion is difficult to comprehend, but it exists today. One cannot live in direct conflict with God's mandates and still have God's favor and blessing. Churches are being established specifically for the fellowship of people who are living in direct contradiction to God's moral laws, and they think being part of a church gives them a privileged connection with God regardless of the fact they are living in rebellion.

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If we back up to verse 4, we read where Micah sees a time when the blinders will be lifted. There will come a time when they desperately need the Lord and He does not answer.

Then they will cry to the LORD, but he will not answer them; he will hide his face from them at that time, because they have made their deeds evil. (3:4)

Some people need tragedy to open their eyes. Some people need to hit bottom before they learn to look up. But one thing for sure, eventually every person will have to come to terms with God, even if it is when they stand before Him as Judge.

E. A True Prophet

Micah goes on to contrast himself against the corrupt seers and diviners that Judah had come to depend on. Micah says their false prophets will be put to shame and disgraced but of himself he says,

But as for me, I am filled with power, with the Spirit of the LORD, and with justice and might, to declare to Jacob his transgression and to Israel his sin. (verse 8)

II. Hope in the Midst of Judgment

The remainder of the book of Micah is a continuation of the theme that has already been established, but now Micah begins to alternate between the themes of judgment and promises of hope. Verses twelve and thirteen are the beginning of the messages of hope.

¹² I will surely assemble all of you, O Jacob; I will gather the remnant of Israel; I will set them together like sheep in a fold, like a flock in its pasture, a noisy multitude of men.

¹³ He who opens the breach goes up before them; they break through and pass the gate, going out by it. Their king passes on before them, the LORD at their head.

A. Hope is always there

“There is no hope apart from judgment; There is no judgment apart from hope.” (J.N. Oswald)

These two verses ought to be powerful reminders to us that no matter how bleak the future may look, God always provides for His own. Even the book of Revelation, as dark and heavy as it is, has a powerful message of hope.

When we consider the condition of the world we now live in and we think about the coming judgment of God during the events of the last days, it is easy to lose heart. God’s judgment is necessary to bring about hope. His judgment is the act of removing what is wrong with this world and making all things new.

III. But What About The Remnant?

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The fact that God is bringing judgment against an entire kingdom (two kingdoms in fact) raises some important questions. Aren't there any righteous people in those kingdoms? Will they have to suffer along with the wicked? Where is the justice in making all suffer alike? The righteous people hearing this message of the coming judgment must be wondering what will become of them. That is why God reminds them he has not forgotten them. Like a good shepherd, he will gather his people into the fold.

It is a bit more difficult for us to identify with the "remnant", because our relationship with God is nothing like Israel's relationship with Him. They had a national identity rooted in God. We don't have that as Americans, and neither does any other nation in the world. We cannot make the mistake of thinking that because God gave this promise to the remnant in Judah and Israel, that this represents a guarantee to all godly people they will never suffer the effects of the evil world they live in. Our hope is not the same as Israel's hope and our circumstances are not the same as theirs. Our hope is anchored in another world. We do indeed occasionally suffer as victims of the wickedness of this world. Prosperity preachers would have you believe you have the power as a child of God to rise above poverty. Positive confession preachers would have you believe godly can live above this sickness and disease. False prophets would have you believe God will tuck his people away safely in the cleft of a rock while the storms and battles rage around you. But none of those things are guaranteed promises to any of us. I would like to believe that God puts a special hedge of protection around his people and we just don't have to worry about thieves and robbers and murderers and rapists and child abductors, and random acts of violence, but we don't have such a shield guaranteed to us. I would love to tell you "something good is going to happen to you today", but I don't know that. I would love to tell you Godly people always prosper and God wants you to be rich. But that is not true. I would love to tell you God is going to heal you today, not everyone gets healed. In fact someday we all die.

What we do have is hope in another life beyond this life where moth and rust do not corrupt, thieves do not break in and steal, and evil is vanquished and violence never occurs. Living for God does not guarantee us a fairy tale ending for us in this life. But the hope of eternal paradise for us far offsets the aches and pains and injustices we may endure here on this earth.