

## **THE BOOK OF MICAH**

### **Lesson 5, Chapter 3**

The words of Micah chapter 3 are some of the most distressing that can be read in not just the book, but the entire Old Testament. They bring sadness, righteous anger, but also a message that we, today, absolutely must hear... yet nearly none will. Among the many natural attributes of fallen humanity is a defensive mindset, and one that believes that if the majority of others do it, then whatever "it" is, it must be right. No one likes to hear that the institutions we value, or our own beliefs that we jealously protect, are wrong and perhaps even corrupt. We don't want to look at our beloved and venerated leaders and hear from some upstart that what those leaders are telling us are said only so that we are so pleased and content, even though what it really amounts to are lies; these leaders speak words that are in opposition to God's truth. Because such a mindset is but human nature, then it ought not to be surprising that over and over again the Bible tells us that only a remnant will ever follow God in truth and righteousness, despite the multitudes that claims Him as their God; but God says: "I do not know you".

Let's read Micah chapter 3.

### **READ MICAH CHAPTER 3 all**

From a literary standpoint, this chapter is one of the easier to interpret and that identifies more in line with customary Hebrew poetry structure. So, keep in mind that because this is poetry, words that illicit emotion are part of the reason for their choice.

From a Hebrew thought process that is somewhat akin (though not identical to) the Western English literary structure that uses paragraphs to introduce new thoughts; we can see 3 of these paragraphs in Micah chapter 3. Yet, they all have something in common. Justice is the core theme of them all. Since this is the case, we need to progress through these verses and paragraphs in the context of the justice being based on the covenants God has made with the Hebrews. It is the only way justice is defined, and the only way it is to be judged and carried out. In the modern world, we use the term "justice" fast

and loose, and each nation if not each person tends to have their own mental image of what justice is. Only occasionally does that kind of justice intersect with Yehoveh's. Unfortunately, Christendom has taught their members to believe in their institutional views of justice, and not the biblical covenantal view.

The first verse opens with a heartfelt plea to the religious leadership of Israel. This is the loving and merciful God begging Israel to listen to Him, repent, and change their ways. If not, all Israel is going to suffer, and this is not something Yehoveh wants to visit upon His own people. But how can a God of justice look the other way? What good are laws and commands if they are not enforced equitably? If those who are disobedient are not punished, then what is the reward for the righteous?

Once again, we see the rather poetic coupling of Jacob and Israel as being synonyms. This is not Yehoveh calling out either Judah or Ephraim, but rather both as a unified group, even though politically at the moment they are two different kingdoms operating under two different kings.

A rhetorical question is asked at the end of verse 1: "Shouldn't you know what justice is?". Because this verse begins with "And I said", it means that this is but a continuation of what was previously said in chapter 2. The message of woe of that began in chapter 2 is being expanded upon in chapter 3. I say this, because I have read from some well-known teachers that chapter 3 actually contradicts chapter 2. There is nothing here to indicate such a thing.

There is some ambiguity about who is speaking. Is it Yehoveh or is it Micah that is the "I" of "And I said"? Frankly, there is enough solid evidence for either way such that it will do us no good for me to take a stand on that. But what I do want to reiterate is that because God's Prophets speak for Him, then it can be assumed that whether it is God's direct utterance, or it is the Prophet's own words, the words are true and so in one sense it doesn't matter.

Since these rulers and leaders God is addressing are not called out by name, then nearly certainly they are not the kings. That is, they are not the civil leadership (the king and his court) per se. Rather they are the priests and

prophets. This isn't meant to set aside the responsibility of the civil leadership towards handing down covenant justice, but as we see in the overall body of chapter 3, this is mainly about who is teaching and leading the people in faith matters. Who it is that is defining justice so that the people believe in whatever that definition is. Even so, the political side and the religious side had become muddled by various of Israel's kings, and the lines of responsibility set down in the Law of Moses had become blurred. So, regardless of the exact terminology Micah uses, it is probably best to just assign this message to all of the various elements of Israel's leadership, with the religious aspect of it that is being emphasized.

Was it not the special duty of all the leadership of Israel to know what God's laws and commands concerning justice are? Yes, it was the priests and prophets that were to know the most, and to teach it to all others. But, yet, it was for both the civil leadership and the people to know God's Torah well enough to detect if what the priests and prophets were saying was in harmony with God's divine scriptures. It is all the more important that those who sit in judgement of others be the most versed in justice.

**CJB Micah 3:2 *Yet you hate what is good and love what is bad. You strip off their skin from them and their flesh from their bones,***

Except in rare cases, we always need to understand the two opposite terms hate and love in their political sense, and not as outpourings of strong emotions. Therefore, for the modern Western mind, we would be better off if this was translated: "Yet you reject what is good and give allegiance to what is bad." It is hard to overstate what a terrible level of corruption was in the minds of these magistrates and judges who were responsible to administrate justice. There is a built-in implication to these words that these leaders who reject good and embrace bad know (to some level) that what they are teaching and doing is wrong. Yet, it is just easier to go with the flow, adhere to the beliefs and customs as they are now, and not rock the boat. In fact, perhaps their jobs depend on it.

Remembering that we are dealing with poetry, then we need to understand this statement about stripping off their skin and their flesh from their bones as

extreme hyperbole to make an emotional impact. It is not literal. Who is the “they’re” that are having this happen to them? It is the common people. The idea, here, is to express the highest level of divine outrage of this state of affairs. It also expresses the grave harm that is being done to everyday folks because of these false doctrines that are being taught instead of God’s truth.

What we read here is applicable to modern times, if only we’ll have the eyes to see and ears to hear. But it takes one other thing as well: the courage of one’s convictions. I want to pause for just a moment to address this, because if we don’t put to work what we learn, then what we learn has no value to Heaven or earth. We don’t have to search very hard, today, to where to find truth. It is in our Bibles that are available everywhere, in almost every language, and appear online. It is up to each of us to examine who it is we believe, what it is they teach, by holding it up to the light of the Word of God to determine if it is truth or something else. The question is: if you are a religious leader, what do you do when you discover that some of the doctrines you were taught turn out to be false? Do you keep on teaching them because keeping your position or job is job number one? Do you continue to knowingly tell un-truths and half-truths from your position of authority because you don’t want to admit you had been wrong, or because of the consequences of now telling the truth makes you insecure?

How about you who are part of the congregation? You have Bibles to fact-check. You have at your fingertips, alternate sources of information usually at no cost. Should you find out much of what you have been receiving and believing is wrong, then what do you do? Do you stay where you are to try and find some middle ground to occupy? Or do you become rather secretive about what you have discovered because you don’t want to disturb your social connections at the place you worship, and so, just go along to get along? Do you leave behind that group and go it alone, or search for others who, too, have discovered the truth and are wandering around rather lonely for fellowship? For leaders and congregation members these are hard questions. And as much as our instincts hope that there might be a mass change of heart and a new dedication to God’s truth versus remaining fully committed to manmade doctrines, if we ever find such a communal reform in the Bible as an example of what to do, it is relatively short-lived and never quite as thorough

as it should be. It also pretty painful. I cannot tell you what each of you ought to do, because I've been right there with you both as congregant and leader. I think what I determined to do is pretty clear and I need not explain it all. Yet, as a general rule of what to do, in God's most direct unequivocal statement, He says this:

**CJB Revelation 18:4-5** ***4..."My people, come out of her! so that you will not share in her sins, so that you will not be infected by her plagues, 5 for her sins are a sticky mass piled up to heaven, and God has remembered her crime***

Come out. Don't stay attached. The danger is too large. You are going to continue to be influenced by the wrong leaders and then suffer what they do for your decision. You are going to continue to compromise what you believe and proclaim a certain way so that it isn't too offensive to your friends. It's not the Bible or the Salvation in Yeshua you would leaving; it is institutions and organizations that oppose God no matter how much they claim the opposite.

So, it is in the strongest language that we read of the spiritual condition of God's people in Micah's day, and by extension, as we find it in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Those who are supposed to exhibit love and concern for the truth do the opposite. It is evil. The harm they do can be eternal, because once people dedicate themselves to a particular philosophy or ideal or to a religious faction, leaving it becomes difficult.

This terrible, gut-wrenching, pathetic situation is exactly as we are reading in Micah chapter 3. Let's move to verse 4.

**CJB Micah 3:4** ***Then they will call to Yehoveh, but he will not answer them; when that time comes, he will hide his face from them, because their deeds were so wicked.***

Here's the danger: once the people are trained up with false doctrines, and that becomes the core of their faith, then they might have no grounds for a relationship with God. And, whenever the religious leaders call on God, He will not answer them because they teach lies. Whatever is outside of what God's

Word is also outside of God's will. Our relationship with God is based not on who we are, but rather on what we believe and what we do as a result. If we are taught that God has a bunch of different attributes than what the Bible teaches us, or we pick and choose some attributes and disregard the others, then when we call out for Him in distress, as far as He's concerned, we are calling out to somebody else. So, why would He answer? This exact sentiment and what is meant, is expressed in a different way in the New Testament.

**CJB Matthew 7:21-23** <sup>21</sup> *"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord!' will enter the Kingdom of Heaven, only those who do what my Father in heaven wants. <sup>22</sup> On that Day, many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord! Didn't we prophesy in your name? Didn't we expel demons in your name? Didn't we perform many miracles in your name?' <sup>23</sup> Then I will tell them to their faces, 'I never knew you! Get away from me, you workers of lawlessness!'"*

Since lawlessness can only mean non-observance of God's laws; and since God's laws are only found in one place, The Law of Moses; the workers of lawlessness are those who claim God but deny Torah relevance to their lives. Thus, faith in Christ is not considered valid and sincere without the proof of it in our obedience to God's commandments. Anyone can look up and yell from their mouths "Lord! Lord!" But the evidence of actual relationship with God is our behavior as controlled and expressed by our adherence to the terms of the covenants God gave to Israel. Not behavior to bring salvation; but salvation to bring forth proper behavior.

Notice in verse 4 why Micah says God judged His people as worthy of condemnation. It is because their deeds were so wicked. Their behavior was so evil. Evil by what standard of behavior? By what your leaders say? By believing your group's doctrines? By believing of yourself that you have a good and righteous heart? Your deeds will be the outward manifestation of what you believe. Christians tend to believe that there is, in Christ, a new and full disconnect between their faith and their deeds; they are in for a rude awakening. How can I say all I just said? Because the Bible is so clear about it.

This term in verse 4 that states “when that time comes” (referring to when we call on the Lord) is End Times vocabulary. “When that time comes”, is synonymous with “when that day comes”, which is synonymous with “when the Day of comes”. You can see with that meaning how closely attached it is to what Messiah said in Matthew 7. In fact, Matthew 7 also includes in that passage the term “on that day”. Both are teachings about when the End of Days approaches and we who are still alive call out to God to deliver us. I would add to that, that this day comes when we are about to die, knowing that we will be judged, we call out for mercy and salvation. And how horrible it would be for God to withhold His presence from us because “I never knew you”. There may be no greater example, if not definition, of what the word “terrified” means.

**CJB Micah 3:5 <sup>5</sup> *Here is what Yehoveh says in regard to the prophets who cause my people to go astray, who cry, "Peace" as soon as they are given food to eat but prepare war against anyone who fails to put something in their mouths:***

These prophets are just one category of leadership that is under the gun in this chapter for their wickedness. This oracle, then, is specifically against prophets. There is a reason that prophets get their own separate message of punishment. Prophets were in many ways the greatest of all of God’s messengers. They brought God’s new revelations to humanity... at first, directly to Israel. Sometimes this was new spiritual insight. Not commentary, not midrash like Rabbis. But rather, more commands and knowledge directly from Yehoveh. At other times it was God’s admonitions. But always it revolved around warnings of Israel’s wrongdoing and on coming Heavenly discipline if reform was not immediately brought about. The reform is always based on the urgent needs of Israel’s leadership and society to return to the ways of the Torah.

Prophets in Micah’s day came in essentially two types: false and true. There were many false prophets running around for every true prophet. Therefore, clearly this message about prophets is brought to Israel by that rare true prophet in a warning to all the many false ones. It is the false ones who cause

God's people to go astray because they tell them lies, but swear God told them what to say. And they do it from positions of authority.

Malachai was the final true prophet of the Hebrew Bible... the Old Testament. After him, the Prophetic Age as it had been, came to a close. The term prophet afterwards morphed a little in meaning to become a person who professed or preached the already existing Word of God as found in the now completed Hebrew Bible. Thus, to put it in more modern terms, prophets were those who taught the Bible or claimed what they say is taken from that as interpreting it. This type of prophet is, by extension, included in God's definition of false prophets when they teach manmade doctrines instead of God's holy Word. Just like the false prophets of ancient times, later false prophets... and right up through today... these false prophets teach what will cause God's people to stray. And, they will be held responsible for it.

What happens when false prophets words are taken as truth, is that justice suffers. People are led into errors but are told that they are behaving righteously. They are told that God finds them just and righteous in His eyes. Further, they bring messages of **shalom** (that is usually translated as peace). Peace is not a great translation because it is too narrow and often it is taken in the wrong way. **Shalom** embraces a divine concept of God-given well-being. It is available only to those who worship the God of Israel in sincerity. What part of this concept that involves peace primarily means harmony between the Giver (God) and the receiver (His worshippers). Yes, peace as an absence of war can certainly be part of any human's well-being. But, **shalom** extends more to abundance, genuine calmness of the inner self, protection and security, and a good future all due to being in harmony with God's order.

So, at the time when Israel was at its worst in wickedness in God's eyes, false prophets were running around telling the people not to worry; that God is sending them to proclaim **shalom**. It would be as if at the same time Noah and his family were building the Ark in obedience to God's command, false prophets were running around telling the people of the earth that everything is fine; there is nothing but goodness and reward in their future. God is well pleased with them. Their behavior isn't wicked, it is good. Don't look upon



those fools building that giant, floating monstrosity or believe anything they say.

The false prophets do this provided they are gifted with food to eat. In other words, when people want a prophet to assure them of God's favor, they pay them. People don't pay prophets who bring bad news. People don't feed prophets who tell them how wicked they are. These prophets are guns for hire. They go to schools to learn how to be prophets. Upon their graduation from their prophet academy they get credentials, usually in the form of a hairy mantle, to wear so as to publicly identify them as prophets. So, the people believe in them even if they pay to buy good news. The only people these false prophets bring bad news to, are those who won't give them money to prophesy good things. What a racket!

I'm hesitant to draw a parallel, but I think you can figure out what that looks like and how it applies to modern times. Perhaps I'll just say that the epitome... the top of the heap... the chiefs of the professors of modern-day false prophecy... are those who preach the well-known Prosperity Doctrine, which says that those who give enough to the Church that the Prosperity Doctrine Pastor leads, will receive all the grand material things their heart desires. They will also receive good health, and long life, among other gifts that God will give them. Thus, the measure of their material wealth reflects of the measure of their faith in God, and that God is well pleased with them. I'll leave it there.

**CJB Micah 3:6** ***"Therefore you will have night, not vision, darkness and not divination; the sun will go down on the prophets, over them the day will be black."***

This is actually classic apocalyptic wording. In fact, it is rare that such words would be used for anything else. Listen to Amos speaking undoubtedly about the End of Days and notice the similarities.

**CJB Amos 5:18-20** ***<sup>18</sup> Woe to you who want the Day of YEHOVEH! Why do you want it, this Day of YEHOVEH? It is darkness, not light; <sup>19</sup> as if someone were to run from a lion, just to be met by a bear; as if he***

***entered a house, put his hand on the wall, just to be bitten by a snake.  
20 Won't the Day of YEHOVEH be darkness, not light, completely dark,  
with no brightness at all?***

So, is this what Micah is speaking about? The End Times? Probably, but only in the sense of a day of judgment coming upon the prophets in which they will be unmasked, and publicly shamed. I've mentioned before that while there will be a final day of called THE Day of Judgement; there have been and will be other days of judgement that are not global-wide or as catastrophic as the final one will be.

Three different elements of God's on His prophets are pronounced: darkness, disgrace, and desertion. The element of darkness means an absence of any revelation from God. They will never get the vision they seek. They will fully realize that there is no hope of anything they speak as coming from God. It's the end of any claim of being a prophet.

Listen to Proverbs 29. First hear the CJB version, and then a more literal rendering.

**CJB Proverbs 29:18 *Without a prophetic vision, the people throw off all restraint; but he who keeps Torah is happy.***

**YLT Proverbs 29:18 *Without a Vision is a people made naked, And whoso is keeping the law, O his happiness!***

Interestingly, the YLT version replaces the original word "torah" with law. Here the meaning is little "L" law. That is, torah is a general word meaning instruction and, in this case, not meant as the formal name of the first 5 books of the Bible. The other thing to notice is the part of the verse that speaks of the people being "made naked". This is original. But it doesn't translate as "without restraint"; it means being shamed. Nakedness is a standard ancient Middle Eastern euphemism for shame. So, without the true vision given by God to a prophet, the people become shamed. But those who observe all of God's torah (all the laws and commands given by Yehoveh, whether by Moses or by the true Prophets) will experience happiness. I will add that this is a true

principle that has never changed, and certainly Yeshua never abolished it or made it something else.

The disgrace they face as the second judgement on them comes about because their prophecies of abundance and happy days and of God's pleasure with His people, fall apart when they are attacked and exiled by foreign powers. The status and glory they used to have has turned to disgrace. A rather common modern-day display of false prophecy comes with a number of well-known Pastors who claim they are Prophets in the mold of John the Revelator and so write telling us they know when the Rapture or the End of Days will arrive. Whisenant's book called 88 Reasons why the Rapture is in 1988, is but one example. Chuck Smith, the founder of Calvary Chapel, wrote of his prediction of the Rapture happening in 1981. Long before that these deluded men who believed God sent them this kind of information came and went as their prophecies failed, and this still happens today. The really odd thing is, people of modern times tend to laugh off these prophetic failures, and when that same person makes yet another prophetic claim, they accept it just like they did the earlier failed one (or ones). That didn't happen as much in the ancient times as prophets whose prophecies failed went under great scrutiny and were sometimes stoned as the Bible ordains.

The third judgement on the false prophets is desertion. God will desert them. And most of the people will desert them as well. Their lucrative prophecy business will be over. They are rendered speechless and have no answers to offer that anyone will take seriously. Other true prophets echoed this same message of warning from Yehoveh.

**CJB Jeremiah 6:13-15 <sup>13</sup> "For from the least to the greatest of them, all are greedy for gains; prophets and cohanim alike, they all practice fraud- <sup>14</sup> they dress the wound of my people, but only superficially, saying, 'There is perfect shalom,' when there is no shalom. <sup>15</sup> "They should be ashamed of their detestable deeds, but they are not ashamed at all; they don't know how to blush. Therefore, when others fall, they too will fall; when I punish them, they will stumble," says Yehoveh.**

As God's true prophet, Micah provides the truth. That truth never waivers or changes. The truth is absolute; not subjective. Sin brings punishment. Sin is defined in the covenants; most specifically and comprehensively in the Law of Moses. Men from pulpits promising a cheery future, and that Believers will not experience tribulation, and that Salvation in Yeshua means all your troubles are at an end, and that you have no further obligations to God than to say the sinner's prayer and get baptized. And that all rules and laws are gone, and obedience to God means only to love Him like one would a kindly grandfather, actually open the gateway to chaos and Hell. These are half-truths and lies. They lead you astray. They deny and dissolve God's order. When these promises fail, people walk away from God. And this is because the God those men in pulpits tell you about, doesn't exist. Yehoveh is known only by His Name and His attributes and His laws. If His name is obscured, or His attributes are changed, or His laws are said to be worthless, defective, and abolished, then this is not the God of the Bible. One may as well worship Baal. Tough talk? Sure; but this is what Micah and the other true prophets of God tell us.

**CJB Micah 3:7 *The seers will be put to shame, the diviners will be disgraced. They will have to cover their mouths, because there will be no answer from God.***

Verses 6 and 7 should never have been separated as they are one continuous thought. We talked about the 3 judgements upon the prophets, and verse 7 finishes spelling them out. The last half of verse 7 that says: "They will have to cover their mouths, because there will be no answer from God, has (in my opinion) a dual meaning. To cover one's mouth was an ancient indication of being in an unclean state. An unclean person who walked around among others who were clean, would customarily put one hand under their nose and above their mouth and walk saying "unclean, unclean". While I don't know how much this still occurred in Micah's day, nonetheless that ancient understanding was still used as a euphemistic expression of calling someone unclean.

Being unclean is not the same as being shamed. Unclean is a ritual purity condition. Shame is a social status that no one wants or can tolerate for very

long. People went to drastic measures to find a way out of their shame and back to a social status of honor. It could go so far as homicide of one who the shamed person thought was responsible for their condition. So, this final statement in the last half of verse 7 adds an unclean ritual condition on those false prophets in addition to them being in a state of shame.

The second part of the dual meaning is to cover their mouths meaning to be shut-up. They will have nothing to say because God will give them nothing to say. There is a nuance to this that is worth noting. The word that is usually translated as “answer” (no answer from God) is **ma’aneh** and means a reply, and not a revelation. So, should a prophet go to God with a question, God will not reply to them. They have permanently lost their position. Keep that in mind when you hear a person claim to be a seer-type of prophet, or when that person is a teacher or preacher type of prophet. If they tell you falsely, God will not answer their inquiries. Do you want to rely on getting your truth from this kind of person?

This 4-verse unit that directly addresses God’s judgement against false prophets is completed with verse 8.

**CJB Micah 3:8** ***On the other hand, I am full of power by the Spirit of Yehoveh, full of justice and full of might, to declare to Ya'akov his crime, to Isra'el his sin.***

This certainly seems to be the words of Micah, expressing his personal (but truthful) thoughts about what he just prophesied on Yehoveh’s behalf. This verse draws the line between who Micah is versus the false prophets, as Micah bluntly identifies himself as full of God’s spirit. And his proof of it is that he is declaring to all Israel their sins in God’s eyes, as opposed to God’s pleasure with their wicked behavior.

It is ironic that in Christendom today, it is a negative epithet to speak of past preachers and Bible teachers as preaching messages of “fire and brimstone” to their audiences. That is, these old- time preachers and teachers spoke of sin and its consequences. Of Hell and its reality. Now they are seen as a thankfully outdated generation because they didn’t tell their congregations that God is

only a God of love, that He would never punish His Believers, that sin was truly a thing of a prior dispensation, and that the congregant's behavior mattered not at all when it came to their salvation. The later 20<sup>th</sup> and now the 21<sup>st</sup> century pastors and preachers only want to give messages of happiness and abundance. Of liberty to live as we like, given to us by Jesus. Of no obligations to God; our relationship with God is a one-way street... He gives us blessings, but we have no duties before Him. Does this not sound exactly... eerily... like what we have just read?

Many English Bible versions will say "full of" instead of "full of justice" as the CJB has it. The CJB is correct, because the Hebrew word is **mishpat** and it means justice, not judgement. Naturally this is speaking of divine, and not human, justice. Justice based on the covenants, not a false justice based upon manmade rules. To get the gist of what Micah is claiming about himself let's turn to another prophet who speaks in the same terms about someone else.

**CJB Isaiah 11:1-5** ***But a branch will emerge from the trunk of Yishai, a shoot will grow from his roots.***

***<sup>2</sup> The Spirit of Yehoveh will rest on him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and power, the Spirit of knowledge and fearing Yehoveh- <sup>3</sup> he will be inspired by fearing ADONAI. He will not judge by what his eyes see or decide by what his ears hear, <sup>4</sup> but he will judge the impoverished justly; he will decide fairly for the humble of the land. He will strike the land with a rod from his mouth and slay the wicked with a breath from his lips. <sup>5</sup> Justice will be the belt around his waist, faithfulness the sash around his hips.***

We'll pause here and continue in Micah chapter 3, next time.