

March 22



CORRUPT LEADERS

Micah 3–6

Micah charges the leaders of Israel and Judah with blatant corruption and calls them—and us—to God’s expectations.

Monday

Psalm 146

The Lord Acts Justly

Tuesday

Isaiah 5:18-24

The Results of Social Injustice

Wednesday

Isaiah 11:1-5

Justice Actions by the Expected Messiah

Thursday

Micah 3:5-8

Prophets Fail on Their Watch

Friday

Micah 6:1-5

Remember God’s Righteous Actions

Saturday

Micah 6:9-16

Cheating and Violence Will Be Punished

Sunday

Micah 3:1-2, 9-12;
6:6-8

God Requires Justice for All



Preparing for the class

- 1 Make a list of the best leaders you've ever had or observed. Write three factors that you believe led to their leadership success. What similarities might indicate important characteristics for all leaders to possess and employ?
- 2 Study the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah in 2 Kings 15–20. How would you describe the religious and political atmosphere of this time period? In what ways is it like our own? In what ways is it different?
- 3 Read Psalm 146. What qualities should characterize God's leaders? Make a list, using this passage as a guide. Use this list to examine your own life, to identify areas of strength, weakness, and needed growth.

Micah 3:1-2, 9-12

¹And I said:

Listen, you heads of Jacob
and rulers of the house of Israel!
Should you not know justice?—

² you who hate the good and love the evil,
who tear the skin off my people,
and the flesh off their bones

⁹ Hear this, you rulers of the house of Jacob
and chiefs of the house of Israel,
who abhor justice
and pervert all equity,

¹⁰ who build Zion with blood
and Jerusalem with wrong!

¹¹ Its rulers give judgment for a bribe,
its priests teach for a price,
its prophets give oracles for money;
yet they lean upon the LORD and say,
“Surely the LORD is with us!
No harm shall come upon us.”

¹² Therefore because of you
Zion shall be plowed as a field;

Jerusalem shall become a heap of ruins,
and the mountain of the house a wooded height.

Micah 6:6-8

- 6 “With what shall I come before the LORD,
and bow myself before God on high?
Shall I come before him with burnt offerings,
with calves a year old?
- 7 Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams,
with ten thousands of rivers of oil?
Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression,
the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?”
- 8 He has told you, O mortal, what is good;
and what does the LORD require of you
but to do justice, and to love kindness,
and to walk humbly with your God?

According to John Maxwell, “Everything rises and falls on leadership.” For the prophet Micah, this certainly held potent truth that would affect not just Israel’s leaders, but all of their followers as well.

This week we turn back the clock to find Micah prophesying before the fall of the Northern Kingdom. His prophecies came during the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, enveloping the years 740-710 BC and making him contemporaneous with Isaiah, Amos, and Hosea.

In the beginning of chapter 3, he vigorously indicts the leaders of Judah and Israel. Of all people, they should not only know right from wrong, but should use their positions to advance the right and repress the wrong. Instead, they hate the good and love the evil.

Because of their twisted morality, they abused the very people they should have been nurturing and protecting. Surely Micah’s image of them skinning and eating their people commanded their attention, for this is powerful language for a people whose laws strictly forbade any such practice.

Many years later, Jesus modeled godly leadership by washing his disciples’ feet, but there is constant temptation for leaders to exploit their followers’ trust for dishonest gain.

In verse 9, Micah continues to speak truth to power as he boldly highlights their abhorrence of justice. The Hebrew word is very strong and means to intensely loathe or detest. As deceitful leaders become more deeply entrenched in wickedness, the more they fear and fight righteousness. Their consciences may blare like megaphones, but the comfort and power of position plug their hearts' ears and they pervert all equity.

The Corruption Spreads

In verse 11, Micah calls out both the political and religious leaders. Those who are supposed to blindly dispense justice in the city-gate courtrooms were tilting the scales in favor of those who lined their pockets. Those with no money to oil the machine were deprived and forced to suffer whatever injustices came their way.

To make matters worse, shekels were also corrupting the priests and prophets. Spiritual leaders should always model higher standards—so high, in fact, that money and materialism are infinitely beneath them. Unfortunately, we all know that Paul's conclusion, "the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil," has always been true (1 Tim. 6:10).

Those who could pay received all the blessings and encouraging teachings they could afford. But the poor had no access to God's favor, which was dispensed for profit by the religious leaders. This temptation continues to haunt anyone who might benefit financially by saying what people want to hear. It could include journalists, politicians, pastors, and denominational or district leaders. Those in leadership must administer God's word with equality and fairness without regard to financial standing.

Covering Tracks

The religious leaders, however, knew just how to couch it. "Surely the LORD is with us! No harm shall come upon us" (v. 11). Even today, many who ignore God's teachings are quick to claim divine support. How often do we hear those with no prior interest in God suddenly invoke God's name for personal benefit?

Politicians can be especially skillful at this. Dropping God's name or a scripture reference while campaigning works wonders at the ballot box. Sadly, such superficial godliness also characterizes many average citizens who will politely nod at God but pursue their own

wills. Those of us in the church can even be guilty of including God in our jargon without honoring God in our actions. We believe that such public proclamations will insulate us from God's judgment. However, Micah reminds us in verse 12 that God will destroy all pious superficiality that masks sinfulness and corruption.

Hope amid Judgment

Micah intermingles harsh judgment with bright hope. Throughout the book he alternates between the two, and we might imagine him saying: "I've got good news and bad news! Which do you want first?"

In chapter 3, he speaks to the short term, while he looks ahead to restoration in chapters 4 and 5. In these later chapters, he paints the picture long cherished by many Brethren of beating swords into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks. In this same context, Micah reveals Bethlehem as the Messiah's future birthplace.

What God Requires from Us

As Micah continues his prophecies to national leaders, he pauses in chapter 6 to contemplate what would please his God. Would it be burnt offerings of calves, thousands of rams, or rivers of oil? Would God be pleased with the sacrifice of Micah's firstborn son? These questions would evoke memories of Solomon's temple dedication and Abraham's binding of Isaac on Mount Moriah.

In verse 8, we discover that such questions are rhetorical, and that God really desires to come alongside as we do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly. Once again, Israel's history frames the answer as this recalls God's answer to Saul in 1 Samuel 15:22, "Surely, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams." Micah 6:8 has also been special for Brethren, and was even used as a theme for Annual Conference.

We notice in this directive that God expects us not simply to appreciate justice, but to do it. This demands that we consider how we can best do justice today.

We also find that kindness is something we are to love. At times we may be tempted to cover injustice with a kind veneer, but God cares about the inner as well as the outer!

Finally, we learn that God desires for us to walk humbly with him. Imagine our Creator, the almighty King of the Universe, desiring our company on an evening stroll! We are told in Genesis that both

Enoch and Noah walked with God. While the Israelites might have expected their patriarchs to have such a relationship, few imagined it for themselves.

Even today, many are amazed to discover that God desires to walk life's pathway with them. Certainly, any honest encounter with God will result in great humility, but with perpetual adoration and understanding we can walk beside God in confidence, joy, and obedience.

Our Need for Jesus

Even this simple answer, however, reminds us of our inability to do any of these well. Ultimately it is God's standards of justice, kindness, and humility that are required, not our own. We all fail to be fair at times, we all treat others unkindly in angry moments, and we all stray from the Master's pathway.

And so, Micah's beautiful and cherished summary of God's expectations reminds us of our need for the Savior who is promised to come from Bethlehem. Only in and through Jesus can we fulfill God's requirements.

Micah's address to his leaders continues to speak to us. Jesus reminded us that "from everyone to whom much has been given, much will be required" (Luke 12:48). Leaders do have added responsibility to uphold justice. Brethren have never been bashful about speaking truth to power. From conscientious objection to foreign policy, we have a rich tradition of sharing whatever insights might best honor God. We must remember, however, our personal responsibility to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with our God.

Since leaders reflect their followers and followers reflect their leaders, these truths demand our attention regardless of where we find ourselves. And since everything rises and falls on leadership, we would be wise to follow God's advice.



Studying the text together

- 1 Read Micah 3:1-3. Discuss the images that come to mind as these verses are shared. How do you think the leaders of Micah's day would have responded to these statements? How do you respond to them? Why would these images be especially offensive to a Jewish audience?

- 2 Read Micah 3:9-12. Discuss the images that come to mind as these verses are shared. How do you think the leaders of Micah's day would have responded to these statements? How do you respond to them? How would replacing Zion in verse 12 with "America" and Jerusalem with "Washington, D.C.," change its impact?
- 3 Imagine how Americans would respond to someone who predicted the destruction of Washington, D.C., New York City, or your hometown. Does God still execute just judgment against nations and countries today? If not, why not? If so, cite examples.
- 4 Share what type of response Micah likely received from the leaders of his day, his peers, and the poor. Why would the three responses likely be different?
- 5 If Micah were speaking tonight in Los Angeles, what types of injustices would he identify in America? What shortcomings would he likely call out in each of the major political parties? What injustices would he identify in our society at large? For what injustices would he indict the church in America? What would he say about the Church of the Brethren if he were to speak at Annual Conference this summer?
- 6 Read Micah 6:6-8. Think of someone who epitomizes these verses. Describe that individual to the rest of the class. Does such a lifestyle come naturally for this person, or does he or she intentionally work at it? Which of the three areas of this passage are you the strongest in, which are you the weakest, and why?
- 7 How do you *do justice* in your community? How could you do justice even better? How are you as a church family *loving kindness*? What could be done to help church members love kindness even more? What concrete steps could class members take to help each other live out this verse? How does it make you feel to know that God wants you to *walk humbly* alongside him? Identify hymns that remind you of your walk with God and sing one or two of them.
- 8 Some believe that Micah's prophecies might have motivated some of Hezekiah's reforms. Do you think this is true? Why, or why not? Do public calls for just practices and proper behavior really cause any long-term change? If not, why not? If so, cite examples.



out of context . . .

*What does the LORD require of you
but to do justice, and to love kindness,
and to walk humbly with your God?
(Micah 6:8).*

I attended a Susquehanna Valley Ministry Center workshop at Elizabethtown College on the Bible and art led by two friends of mine, Bob Neff and Chris Bucher. One of the people who signed up was a rabbi who illustrated his comments with a Jewish fable. I asked him for the original source. I present it here because it illustrates how important it is to know and understand your scriptures, which is kind of what Micah is saying here as well.

At the time of the Bar Kokhba rebellion around the year AD 132, which the Romans brutally crushed, the great Rabbi Akiva continued to read the holy books even though it was illegal. Why did he do so? his disciples asked. Rabbi Akiva told them this fable.

A fox observed the fish in a river leaping wildly to and fro. When he asked why, the fish told the fox they were attempting to escape the nets of the humans. The fox then asked the fish why they didn't join him on dry land so they could live together as their ancestors had long ago.

The fish replied, "Why do they call you wise? If we have every reason to fear in the environment that gives us life, how much more do we have to fear in your environment of death."

The moral, according to Rabbi Akiva, is that if it is dangerous enough to study the Torah under threat of death, how much more danger would there be to live life without the Scriptures?