

## CORRUPT LEADERS

Lesson Scripture: Micah 3-6

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

*Key Verse: 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 (NRSV)*

### MICAH 3:1-3, 9-12; 6:6-8 (NRSV)

#### Micah 3:1-3

1 And 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;

3 who eat the flesh of my people, flay their skin off them, break their bones in pieces, and chop them up like meat in a kettle, like flesh in a caldron.

#### 9-12

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.

#### 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

### MICAH 3:1-3, 9-12; 6:6-8 (KJV)

#### Micah 3:1-3

1 And I said, Hear, I pray you, O heads of Jacob, and ye princes of the house of Israel; Is it not for you to know judgment?

2 Who hate the good, and love the evil; who pluck off their skin from off them, and their flesh from off their bones;

3 Who also eat the flesh of my people, and flay their skin from off them; and they break their bones, and chop them in pieces, as for the pot, and as flesh within the caldron.

#### 9-12

9 Hear this, I pray you, ye heads of the house of Jacob, and princes of the house of Israel, that abhor judgment, and pervert all equity.

10 They build up Zion with blood, and Jerusalem with iniquity.

11 The heads thereof judge for reward, and the priests thereof teach for hire, and the prophets thereof divine for money: yet will they lean upon the Lord, and say, Is not the Lord among us? none evil can come upon us.

12 Therefore shall Zion for your sake be plowed as a field, and Jerusalem shall become heaps, and the mountain of the house as the high places of the forest.

#### 6:6-8

6 Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God? shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves of a year old?

7 Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or 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?

of my body for the sin of my soul?

8 He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?

## INTRODUCTION

Micah is a prophet who cherished a deep love for his country. The intimate language he used in the **Lesson Scripture** shows us this. Micah grieved for his people. He wrote at a time when Judah was still benefiting from a past period of great economic prosperity. But the benefits did not flow fairly to all sectors of the society. (Maybe this is a familiar scene for some of us.) The rich landlords, many of whom had profited from the prosperous times, displayed boundless greed. They robbed the poor and did whatever they could to maintain and increase their wealth. The injustice which was widespread at that time is the focus of Micah’s discourse in the **Lesson Scripture**.

Further, and to Micah’s disgust, these rich people were aided and supported by corrupt judges in the courts. And they



Micah’s concern was for the social ills of the day.

had partners among the lying prophets (religious leaders) in places of worship. All of this created tensions in the society. These tensions could not be ignored. Pay attention to the prophet’s declaration in verse 8. Only a person filled with the power and spirit of the Lord can speak truth to the powerful ruling class in the way Micah spoke. Micah also makes this statement at verse 5. This showed his confidence in speaking as God’s mouthpiece. Note also that at that time Judah was sliding deeper into idolatry. Yet Micah does not focus on this. (This was the focus of Amos and Hosea.) Micah’s concern was for the social ills of the day.

## TELLING THE BIBLE STORY

These notes point for the most part to the printed passages of the **Lesson Scripture**.

In the **Lesson Scripture**, we see a prophet expressing God's outrage at the injustice in the society. At some points the anger is cutting. Maybe this is because the persons who practiced the injustices included the religious leaders (the prophets). They were supposed to reflect God's justice, not ignore and/or corrupt it. Micah made use of striking hyperbole (exaggerated comparisons). This is not unique to Micah.

We see instances of it also in Ezekiel 34 and Zephaniah 3. Note, too, the courtroom drama format in the text. This legal-like presentation was used as well by other prophets like Isaiah (Chapters 3 and 41), Hosea 4, and Malachi 3.

In Micah 3:1-2 the prophet made it clear who he was addressing. He screamed at the deceiving prophets, "Isn't it you who were expected to know and practice justice?" Then, in verse 9, he called out the leaders of Israel and Judah, Jacob's descendants. These people were flooding the society with habitually gross, immoral behavior. Their behaviors showed they

hated justice and fairness. Instead they loved corruption, bribes, and bloodshed.

In the courts, the judges gave the verdicts people wanted if the people paid the right price. The prophets did the same. They "prophe-*lied*" (gave false prophecies for money). And, in this odd scenario, these leaders still pretended to worship God. They went through the religious rituals faithfully. What's more,

they claimed special favors from God. Despite the abuses and oppression they laid on the poor, they still saw themselves as God's favorite people (verses 3:11-12). But God had a surprise for them.

In Micah 6:6-8 we find declarations that echoes throughout the scriptures. What God really desires

from the faithful is not elaborate rituals and sacrifices. Long worship services by unfaithful people do not impress God. God wants obedience to God's commandments. Indeed, our worship has no meaning unless it flows from sincere hearts which want to obey God's rules of honesty, justice, and love. This principle

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is fundamental to all religious activities. Therefore, we see it in both the Old and New Testaments (1 Samuel 15; Psalms 15, 24, 50, and 51; Hosea 6 and Matthew 9).

### SANKOFA

In the **Lesson Scripture** we saw the secular and the religious leaders of Micah's day walking together down the streets of injustice. They walked hand in hand as they abused and oppressed the majority of the population. This caught God's attention and God showed Micah that the Lord would step in to end the injustice. Again we make the point that no system of injustice can last forever. God would not allow that.

Unfortunately, this situation of religious leaders supporting systems of injustice did not stop in Micah's age. We had a shining example of the same in South Africa during the apartheid period. In that era (1948 – 1994), some prominent church leaders used the scriptures to justify that system of injustice. They

supported the government and were silent on the atrocities unleashed on the majority black population. After the system collapsed, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission confirmed what people had suspected for decades. Witnesses who appeared before the Commission gave heart-wrenching testimonies of the draconian measures the authorities used to eliminate opposition and keep the majority population in subjection.

The Lord raised up people with the courage and foresight to believe that the days of institutionalized injustice would come to an end in South Africa.

Given the support which the government and rich ruling class had both within the country and internationally, it was difficult to see an end to apartheid. Yet God did what God is good at doing. The Lord raised up people with the courage and foresight to believe that the days of institutionalized injustice would come to an end in South Africa. Bit by bit, often at great personal sacrifice, the activists for justice chipped away at the system of injustice. And then it happened. Freedom came to South Africa in 1994. The systematic oppression of the majority ended.

Today, we give God thanks for leaders like Steve Biko, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Nelson Mandela, Ahmed Kathrada, Dorothy Adams (of AME heritage), and Victoria Mxenge and her husband. They trampled their personal fears to stop a privileged few from trampling on the rights of the majority. Through them, God proved once again that God will not allow any system of injustice to continue indefinitely. These liberators were not perfect people. Yet, they did a perfect job to pull down systems of injustice similar to what Micah wrote about.

### CASE STUDY

For a similar case in American history, we can look at the period of the Confederacy (especially the 1860's). Here again, many church leaders were in step with the elite plantation owners and merchants. They locked hands and hearts to suppress and oppress the working-class people. History's accounts show where preachers used the Bible to justify the practice of slavery. Some called it a "necessary evil." Others went further to argue that black

people would be slaves even in heaven. They used Bible accounts like the one with Noah and Ham to justify this twisted thinking.

As in the days of Micah, people who called themselves God's servants became props for a system of exploitation of poor people. And, their support for slavery and the unjust practices associated with it was not soft or casual. One professor

of American Religious History (Harry Stout) put it this way; he noted, "If you pull the church out of the whole equation, it's highly likely that there never would have been a Civil War." We can debate the degree of truth in that statement. However, it still powerfully conveys a startling truth. The church, God's institution

to which people should look for truth and justice, had become part of the problem rather than the solution. Did this apply to the whole church? Of course not! As we know, it was mainly the church in the southern part of America. This is the same type of charge Micah filed against the prophets of his day.



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We must appreciate this truth to understand why the Confederate flag is still a symbol of pain for many African Americans. As Carol Kuruville wrote in *HuffPost* online (6/22/2015), “Black activists and many others consider it (the Confederate flag) a symbol of oppression and a reminder of a government that longed to keep black people in chains forever.” In line with Micah 6, truth shone through the dark days of slavery. That section of the church which was in error came to recognize and admit the error. In 1995, the Southern Baptist Convention formally apologized for its role in “condoning and/or perpetuating individual and systematic racism in our lifetime.”

Why did we refer to these matters? Was it to point an accusing finger at a section or denomination of the church? Far from that! We used this case to convey three truths. First, the alliance between rich people and the prophets (church leaders) which Micah saw in his day, repeated

itself down through history. We may even see traces of it today. Second, the way God brings about the end to injustice is not always pretty. Sometimes, it is by peaceful civil resistance as with the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King and the Civil Rights Movement. But at other times it is bloody, as was the case with the American Civil

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War. Third, we must appreciate that while we do not live in a perfect society, yet we must be deeply grateful for the freedoms and liberties we now enjoy. To do otherwise is to disrespect the people God used to fight for those freedoms. Are you grateful? How do you show it?

#### LIFE APPLICATION

As believers we naturally put high value on justice, kindness, and humility. When we speak of these values in the abstract in discussions, we have no problem. The challenges come, however, when we try to apply the ideas to daily life and our position on certain issues. Use this lesson to assess your position on things like the treatment of undocumented immigrants.

Likewise, consider your attitudes to ex-convicts, and the rights of the unborn. I readily agree that these are complex issues. Yet, our sense of justice demands that we have a position on each matter.

For example, ask yourself to what extent should former convicts have their civil rights restricted. Should they be allowed to vote after their release from prison? And, what about their access to government jobs and contracts? Many of us feel that other things being equal, they should be allowed to take part in all activities in society. Your own sense of justice will determine how you vote and who you support when such matters are put in the public domain for decisions.

In a similar vein is the matter of the treatment of undocumented immigrants. Is it just that these people have reasonable access to health care in times of need? Consider the extent to which your sense of justice moves you to help them when you can. In this context, remember that many slaves got freedom and started a

better life because people with a sense of justice helped them through the Underground Railroad. And, note that at that time it was illegal to offer such assistance.

Finally, think about how you show support for leaders who live up to your idea of decency. One of the best ways to demonstrate hatred for corrupt leaders is to openly show appreciation for just leaders. The gifts we present to pastors and other leaders in appreciation events can be fuel for them to keep on the right track. Therefore, we must not overlook the importance of events like Pastor's Appreciation Day. And, within our means, we must participate.

On the other hand, we should be equally quick to show our disgust for corrupt leaders whether in the church or in politics. This is where we need to consider our involvement in public protest and the signing of petitions of condemnation. But, note we must be consistent. We cannot demand justice when our favorite leader is in office, and



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be silent when other leaders are there. From the Bible we see that God was very fair in this respect. When the heathen nations violated God's commandments, God chastised them. When the chosen people Israel were guilty of ungodliness, the Lord also punished them. Therefore, as believers we cannot be partisan in our calls for justice.

### QUESTIONS

1. How can we respectfully call to account those leaders who we think have failed to live up to God's standards of fairness?
2. How do you detect when a person in ministry is "prophe-lying" (i.e. giving false prophecy)?
3. The text seems to suggest that how we treat people is as important as or even more important than religious rituals. How do we reflect this in our daily living?

### CLOSING DEVOTIONS

Show appreciation for our freedom in Christ and in our society by singing "Victory in Jesus" or "Free, Free, Free, I've Been Set Free."

**Prayer:** Father, I thank you for the freedoms I enjoy today and for the people you moved to fight for them. Amen.

## HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

March 16-March 22

<b>Monday</b>	Psalm 146 (The Lord Acts Justly)
<b>Tuesday</b>	Isaiah 5:18-24 (The Results of Social Injustice)
<b>Wednesday</b>	Isaiah 11:1-5 (Justice Actions by the Expected Messiah)
<b>Thursday</b>	Micah 3:5-8 (Prophets Fail on Their Watch)
<b>Friday</b>	Micah 6:1-5 (Remember God's Righteous Actions)
<b>Saturday</b>	Micah 6:9-16 (Cheating and Violence Will Be Punished)
<b>Sunday</b>	Micah 3:1-3, 9-12; 6:6-8 (God Requires Justice for All)