

The Minor Prophets
Lesson 23: A Ruler Is Coming!
(Micah 3—5)

II. A Promise Message: A Deliverer Is Coming! (Micah 3:1—5:15)

Micah's second message is at the heart of the book and focuses on Israel's future. Micah rebuked the leaders of the nation for their sinful conduct, which God would judge (3:1-12), and he outlined the events that would usher in the promised kingdom (4:1—5:15). Knowing that God has such a glorious future planned for their nation should have motivated the leaders to turn from their sins and obey the Lord. "Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure" (1 John 3:3 NIV). Alas, they didn't even pay attention to the sermon!

A. Rebuke: The Sins of the Leaders (3:1-12)

As with Micah's other two messages, this second message opens with a call for the people to "hear" what the Lord would say through His servant (1:2; 6:1). It's as though Micah had shouted, "Listen! God is speaking! This is important!" The statement reminds us of the Lord's repeated admonition, "Who has ears to hear, let him hear!" or the warning in Hebrews 12:25: "See that you do not refuse Him who speaks" (NKJV).

It's a dangerous thing to turn a deaf ear to the voice of God when He speaks through His Word. "Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts" (3:7-8 NKJV). All creation responds to the voice of God and gladly obeys His will—except man, who is made in His own image! Yet, the Father lovingly says to us, "Now, therefore, listen to me, my children; pay attention to the words of my mouth" (Prov. 7:24 NKJV).

Micah speaks to and rebukes three groups:

1. The civil authorities (3:1-4).

- These men were not only permitting the wealthy to exploit the poor but were also doing it themselves.
- Leaders are supposed to love the good and hate the evil, but these men were just the opposite: They "hate good and love evil" (v. 2).
- The city gate was the place where the elders met to settle disputes and make official decisions (Ruth 4:1ff.). If there was no justice in the cities, there could be no justice in the land.
- The description of these rulers' actions reminds you more of ravenous beasts than of human beings. Instead of being faithful shepherds who protected the flock (Mic. 2:12; 7:14), they attacked the sheep, skinned them alive, butchered them, chopped them up, and made stew out of them!
- But the day would come when these wolves in shepherds' clothing would cry out for God's mercy, but no mercy would be given.

2. The False Prophets (3:5-8).

- The false prophets' lies made it easy for the corrupt officials to carry on their evil deeds. "An astonishing and horrible thing has been committed in the land: The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests rule by their own power; and My people love to have it so" (Jer. 5:30-31 NKJV).
- When God is left out of human government, it's easy for officials to use their authority selfishly to exploit the people.
- As long as you gave them something to eat and drink (Mic. 2:11), the prophets would declare whatever kind of message you wanted to hear. Like those of Jeremiah's day, they announced peace when war and desolation were just around the corner (Jer.6:13-14; 8:10-11).
- But the time would come when these men who claimed to see the light would be shrouded in darkness, and everybody would know that they were counterfeits.
- God's true prophet is described in Micah 3:8: This prophet is filled with the Spirit, faithfully proclaiming God's message and unafraid of what people might say or do.
- Micah fearlessly told the people their sins and warned them that judgment was coming, while the false prophets tickled the people's ears and told them what they wanted to hear.
- Few men are as pitiable as those who claim to have a call from God yet tailor their sermons to please other. Their first rule is "Don't rock the boat"; their second is "Give people what they want." But a true servant of God declares God's message regardless of whether the people like it or not.

3. All Leaders of the land (Micah 3:9-12).

- Micah also addressed the rulers, the priests, and prophets and accused them of numerous sins: committing injustice, distorting the truth, murdering innocent people, accepting bribes, and while doing these evil deeds, claiming to be serving the Lord!
- Their ignorance of the Lord's character and the terms of His covenant gave them this false confidence. "Since we're Jews," they reasoned, "God's chosen people and sharers in His covenant, the Lord will never permit anything evil to happen to us. Even if we sin, He will never abandon us to the enemy."
- Any theology that makes it easy for us to sin is not biblical theology.
- Had the rulers, prophets, and priests read and pondered Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28—30, they would have discovered that the God of the covenant is a holy God who will not countenance high-handed sin.
- What would be the result of the leaders' flouting God's law? Their Holy City and temple would be destroyed, and thousands of Jewish people would be exiled to Babylon (Mic. 4:10). God would rather destroy the city and the beautiful temple than allow His people to defile His property by their sins.

"For the sins of her prophets, and the iniquities of her priests" (Lam. 4:13) the nation was defeated, and the city and temple were destroyed. That is why the prophet opened his message by rebuking the spiritual leaders of the land, not the unbelievers.

B. Hope: The Promises of The Lord (4:1—5:5A). Micah moved from the destruction of Jerusalem (606-586 BC) to the “last days,” when there will be a new Jerusalem and a rebuilt temple at the heart of the righteous kingdom of the Messiah. The period known as “the last days” began with the ministry of Christ (Heb. 1:1-2), and it climaxes with His return to establish His kingdom on earth. The Lord gave His people four wonderful promises.

1. **A promised kingdom (4:1-8).** The situation of the two little Jewish kingdoms was hopeless when Micah delivered his message. Assyria was about to pounce on Israel and put an end to that nation, and then the Assyrian army would ravage Judah and almost take Jerusalem. When the outlook is grim, try the uplook. Thus, the prophet encouraged the people to look ahead to what God had promised for His chosen people.
 - God promised that the nation would be united, and the people returned to their land. Jerusalem would become the world’s most important city, the temple would be rebuilt, and the true worship of Jehovah would be restored (see Ezek. 40—48).
 - Instead of the Gentile nations fighting the Jews, they would “stream” to Jerusalem to worship God and hear His word.
 - Every Jewish family wanted to achieve what Micah described in 4:4: a pleasant home with a productive garden in a peaceful land. But even more than peace and economic stability was the blessing of knowing the Lord and obeying Him (Mic. 4:5).
 - Though the remnant of Jews might be small, weak, and lame, God will gather them from all the nations and make a mighty army out of them (vv. 6-7a).
 - Jerusalem had once been the capital city of David, the shepherd-king who cared for the flock. But after the death of Josiah, not one of his four successors was a godly man. Messiah, the Son of David, will one day reign from Jerusalem and care for His flock as a faithful Shepherd-King.
2. **A promised deliverance (4:9-10).** The city of Jerusalem is called “daughter of Zion” (cities are usually classified as feminine), a term of endearment that assured the people of God’s loving care no matter what might happen.
 - But the city was in travail, like a woman with child, because the enemy had arrived and was capturing the people and taking them to Babylon. However, the exile wasn’t the end; for God would redeem a remnant and bring them back to the land.
 - Had the leaders listened to the prophet Jeremiah and peacefully surrendered to the Babylonians, they would have saved the city and the temple, but they resisted God’s will, and their city and temple were ruined.
 - However, Jeremiah promised that the exile would last only seventy years, and then the remnant could return and rebuild the city and the temple.
3. **A promised conquest (4:11-13).** Once again, the prophet looked down the centuries to the end of times and saw his people being attacked by many Gentile nations, all of them gloating over Israel because they are so sure of defeating the Jews (see Zech. 12:1-9; 14:1-11). The nations are sure of victory because they ignore Scripture and don’t know God’s plan for His people (Jer. 29:11).

- Israel will look weak and defenseless, but the Lord will make their soldiers sharp threshing instruments to “harvest” the nations (Rev. 14:14-20).
- God will give them “horns” (a symbol of power) and “hoofs” so that they will have both power and speed as they attack their enemies.
- This great battle is usually called “the battle of Armageddon,” although that phrase is not found in Scripture (Rev. 16:16; 19:17-21). When the battle is over, the victorious Jewish army will devote all the spoils to the service of the Lord.

4. A promised King (5:5 a). Now Micah looks ahead to the Babylonian siege of Jerusalem. So many soldiers are encamped around Jerusalem that Micah calls her “the city [daughter] of troops.”

- When King Zedekiah and his officers see that their situation is hopeless, they try to escape, but the Babylonians catch up with them and capture them (2 Kings 25:1-7).
- The king is humiliated, struck across his face with a rod. Then they killed his sons, put out his eyes, bind him and take him to Babylon.
- The fact that Micah 5:2 is in contrast to verse 1 (“But, thou Bethlehem”) is another proof that verse 1 is not speaking about Jesus; for verses 2-5 definitely refers to Messiah. God selected the “little town of Bethlehem” as the place where the King of the Jews was to be born.
 - Bethlehem (“house of bread”) has an interesting history. Jacob’s favorite wife, Rachel, died near Bethlehem. Matthew cites this when he reports the slaying of the innocent children by Herod.
 - Ruth and Naomi came to Bethlehem; there Boaz fell in love with Ruth and married her. Ruth is an ancestor of the Messiah (Matt. 1:5).
 - David was Bethlehem’s greatest son; and it was through David’s family that the promised Messiah would be born.
- The Son of God was born in a humble stable (or cave) in Bethlehem. But the day would come when He would be glorified and take His throne in heaven; and one day, He shall return to be Ruler over His people. However, before he can stand as a Shepherd and care for His flock, His own people must reject Him. Between the cross and the kingdom age, Israel will be “given up” by the Lord until the time when Jesus returns and to the nation is “born” into her kingdom (see Isa. 66:8).

Micah presented an encouraging scenario to the people, but they didn’t seem to grasp the significance; for if they had, they would have turned to the Lord in gratitude and repentance. Whenever a prophet foretold the future, it was to awaken the people to their responsibilities in the present. Bible prophecy isn’t entertainment for the curious; it’s encouragement for the serious.

C. Victory: The Purging of the Nation (5:5b-15)

As he continued to view the distant scene, Micah announced that Israel’s future enemies would be defeated (vv. 5b-6), the Jewish remnant would be blessed (vv. 7-9), and the nation would be purged of its sins (vv. 10-15).

- 1. The enemy defeated (Mic. 5:5b-6).** “The Assyrian” named in verse 5 isn’t the Assyrian army of Micah’s day, for the Jews in that day certainly didn’t defeat Assyria and the rule over her land. The Assyrians soundly defeated Israel, and the land of

Israel was ruined. “The Assyrian” is another way of saying “the enemy,” and here it refers to Israel’s enemies in the last days when all the nations will gather against her.

- The phrase “seven shepherds...eight leaders” (NIV) is a way of saying “many shepherds, many leaders,” and is similar to the repeated statement of Amos “for three transgressions...and for four” (Amos 1:3, 6, 9).
- When the enemy attacks in the last days, God will raise up leaders to face the enemy, just as He had raised up the judges and heroes like David.
- But Micah makes it clear that God is the Deliverer who will enable Israel to defeat her enemies and rule over their lands. The “he” of Micah 5:6 is the “ruler” of verse 2.

2. **The nation purged (vv. 10-15).** In Micah’s day, both Israel and Judah were guilty of sins that violated God’s law and grieved God’s heart. Time after time, He had sent messengers to the people to denounce their sins and warn of impending judgment, but the people wouldn’t listen (2 Chron. 36:14-21).

- In the last days, Israel will return to her land in unbelief and practice these same sins. But God will purge the land and prepare them for a new life in the kingdom. They will see their Messiah, trust Him, and be saved (Zech. 12:10—13:1).
- God will destroy all their military defenses, the things that they trusted instead of trusting the Lord. He will end their traffic with demonic powers and eliminate all idolatry from the land.
- Israel will now seek to please God and obey His law and not imitate the sins of the nations on which God will “take vengeance.”
- God has not cast aside His people (Rom. 11:1); for today there is a believing remnant of Jews in the church. One day God will gather the unbelieving Jewish nation to their land, cause them to experience suffering, and then reveal Himself to them and give birth to a new nation.

Christians today look for Jesus to return to gather His people to Himself (1 Thess. 4:13-18) and then establish His righteous kingdom. Peter assures us that “the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night;” and then, in light of this fact, he asks, “Therefore...what manner of persons ought you be in holy conduct and godliness?” (2 Peter 3:10-11 NKJV). Future hope ought to produce present holiness.

Are we ready for His return?

Questions for Personal Reflections Or Group Discussion

1. How can you tell when someone is truly listening?
2. Give a description of people who hate the evil and do the good. What are they like? What sorts of things do they do?

3. Why do you think the word of the Lord through Micah contained the vicious image of the rulers in 3:1-3?
4. Who are the people today whose lives have made it easy for corrupt officials to carry on their evil deeds? What, if anything, can we do about this?
5. How can we balance being lovingly sensitive to people but not trying too much to please them?
6. The Jews had false confidence because of their incorrect understanding of God and His promises. What false confidence toward God have you heard people proclaim?
7. When you read the prophets rebuking those who commit or tolerate injustice, do you feel that they are talking about somebody else, or also about you? Explain.
8. Wiersbe says, "When the outlook is grim, try the uplook." What does he mean? What does God provide for a Christian who needs renewal?
9. In your explanation of the gospel to an unbeliever, how does the subject of heaven enter in? If someone were to grasp the significance of this hope of heaven, what would you expect to occur?
10. What does this statement of Wiersbe's mean to you: "Future hope ought to produce present holiness"?

Homework: Read **Micah 6-7**. Study title, "Thy Kingdom Come"