No Rest for the Wicked

Bible Background • Micah 2
Printed Text • Micah 2:4–11
Devotional Reading • Proverbs 11:1–10

Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will: EXPLORE Micah’s depiction of people who deny their wrongdoing in the community; EXPRESS feelings about people who attempt to justify the evil and harm they commit; and RESPOND with appropriate opposition to those engaged in wrongdoing in the community.

In Focus

Bill ran to his office in a panic. He didn’t think this could ever happen to him. His plan had been working for the last three years, and he had no idea it would all come crashing down on him today. He immediately started emptying file cabinets. His secretary Doris came in with her notepad. “You won’t need that notepad, Doris. There’s only one thing I need you to do for me right now,” he said. “What’s that, Bill?” she asked. “See all this stuff?” He motioned toward all the papers on the floor. “Get rid of it.” Bill wasted no time and did not even check to see if she comprehended what he said. He did not have time. They were coming, and if they found any shred of evidence, he would be indicted. Bill thought about what this would mean for his career, his family, his reputation. After all, he had to do what he’d done to further his political career. Right? His stomach began to churn and he became nauseated. They had to get these records out of here. “Hurry up, Doris,” Bill said. “Now is not the time to hesitate.” Just then, they heard a knock on the door. Could it be that Bill was going to reap what he had sown?

In today’s lesson, we learn that we cannot justify evil and wrongdoing in our communities and those who do will face the judgment of God.

Keep in Mind

“O thou that art named the house of Jacob, is the spirit of the LORD straitened? are these his doings? do not my words do good to him that walketh uprightly?” (Micah 2:7).
Focal Verses

KJV Micah 2:4 In that day shall one take up a parable against you, and lament with a doleful lamentation, and say, We be utterly spoiled: he hath changed the portion of my people: how hath he removed it from me! turning away he hath divided our fields.

5 Therefore thou shalt have none that shall cast a cord by lot in the congregation of the LORD.

6 Prophesy ye not, say they to them that prophesy: they shall not prophesy to them, that they shall not take shame.

7 O thou that art named the house of Jacob, is the spirit of the LORD straitened? are these his doings? do not my words do good to him that walketh uprightly?

8 Even of late my people is risen up as an enemy: ye pull off the robe with the garment from them that pass by securely as men averse from war.

9 The women of my people have ye cast out from their pleasant houses; from their children have ye taken away my glory for ever.

10 Arise ye, and depart; for this is not your rest: because it is polluted, it shall destroy you, even with a sore destruction.

11 If a man walking in the spirit and falsehood do lie, saying, I will prophesy unto thee of wine and of strong drink; he shall even be the prophet of this people.

NLT Micah 2:4 In that day your enemies will make fun of you by singing this song of despair about you: “We are finished, completely ruined! God has confiscated our land, taking it from us. He has given our fields to those who betrayed us.”

5 Others will set your boundaries then, and the LORD’s people will have no say in how the land is divided.

6 “Don’t say such things,” the people respond. “Don’t prophesy like that. Such disasters will never come our way!”

7 Should you talk that way, O family of Israel? Will the LORD’s Spirit have patience with such behavior? If you would do what is right, you would find my words comforting.

8 Yet to this very hour my people rise against me like an enemy! You steal the shirts right off the backs of those who trusted you, making them as ragged as men returning from battle.

9 You have evicted women from their pleasant homes and forever stripped their children of all that God would give them.

10 Up! Begone! This is no longer your land and home, for you have filled it with sin and ruined it completely.

11 Suppose a prophet full of lies would say to you, “I’ll preach to you the joys of wine and alcohol!” That’s just the kind of prophet you would like!

The People, Places, and Times

Micah. His name is actually a sentence that befittingly proclaims “Who is like Yah(weh)?” Very little is known about the prophet. He was from the town of Moresheth-Gath,
which is approximately twenty miles southwest of Jerusalem and centrally located halfway
between Jerusalem and Gaza. The prophet ministered from 740–690 B.C. during the reigns of
Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah. The prophet informs us that the word of “I Am” (Yahweh/The
Lord) came to him through a vision. As such, Micah boldly proclaims, “I am full of power by the
spirit of the Lord, and of judgment, and of might” (from 3:8), all of which are reflected in his
oracles (messages from God). These oracles concerned the destruction of Jerusalem and Samaria
due to injustice, corrupt government, idolatry, and dishonest economic principles. One of
Micah’s most amazing feats was that even within his prophecy of doom, he was able to remain
hopeful regarding Jerusalem’s future. He foretold of the Messiah and even the city of His birth.
Micah is known as one of the twelve minor prophets, a category based solely on the length of the
author’s work, not their importance or status.

**House of Jacob.** Jacob was a patriarch of the nation of Israel. The name Jacob means
“heel grabber.” God renamed Jacob as a result of spiritual transformation (Genesis 35:10). He is
no longer Jacob the heel grabber but Israel, or “he who strives with God.”

**Lamentation.** A lamentation is an elegy or dirge. The first biblical example of a
lamentation is the lament of David over Saul and Jonathan (2 Samuel 1:17–27). The lamentation
was a frequent accompaniment of mourning (Amos 8:10). Prophecy sometimes took the form of
a lament when it predicted calamity (Ezekiel 27:32; Isaiah 47:1).

**Background**

Micah ministered during a time in which Assyria enjoyed great power and influence. The
Northern Kingdom of Israel had already fallen. King Ahaz of Judah made an arrangement with
Assyria to prevent the fall of Judah. The Southern Kingdom would pay large tribute and honor
Assyria’s gods. As a result, idol worship spread throughout Judah.

In the opening chapter of Micah, the Lord invited the nations to be witnesses as He
judged His people. Micah 1 describes the Lord being roused from His throne to execute
judgment in response to the transgressions of His people. He brought judgment on Samaria, the
capital of Israel and the center of idol worship. Likewise, He brought judgment on Jerusalem,
which was rife with idolatry.

Micah uttered oracles of judgment against Samaria and then against Jerusalem. While
most of the oracles were directed at Judah, Israel was also mentioned in the pronouncement of
judgment in order to serve as an example and warning of what will happen to Judah.
Samaria would be destroyed. The walls would be broken down, the foundations would be laid bare, and vineyards would be planted where their streets once were (Micah 1:6). Her destruction came in 722 B.C., after a three-year siege by the Assyrian army.

The Lord also named specific cities in Judah where His judgment would be visited. The Lord gave His reasons for His judgment against Judah: the greed and covetousness of the rich and the oppression of the lower class.

Micah 2 begins with the description of the deeds of the wealthy land barons and their wanton greed. The rich seized the houses and land of the poor and stole their possessions. The Lord promised to reward their evil with evil and that the oppressors would themselves be oppressed.

At-A-Glance

1. The Land Divided (Micah 2:4–5)
2. The Lord Incited (vv. 6–9)
3. The Lies Invited (vv. 10–11)

In Depth

1. The Land Divided (Micah 2:4–5)

The rich are getting richer at the expense of the poor. Greedy land barons confiscate the lands, homes, and goods of the poor. The Lord promises judgment for this injustice and tells them that they will suffer the same injustice (vv. 4–5). Assyria will confiscate the lands, homes, and goods that the rich have taken. Further, they will taunt Judah with their own lamentations.

The people of Judah will lament that they are “utterly spoiled” and that the Lord has taken away their inheritance. Their lands will be taken from them and given to their enemies. The “fields” that have been unjustly acquired will be divided among their conquerors.

Though their lament is in response to divine judgment, the elements of the lament include charges against the Lord. They accuse the Lord of unjustly giving their rightful possession, or portion, to others. They also lament that He has turned away from them, giving their enemies the fields that once belonged to the house of Jacob.
2. The Lord Incited (vv. 6–9)

The people of Judah have no interest in Micah’s message of judgment. “Don’t prophesy like that,” they say (v. 6, NLT). They do not believe that any calamity will befall them. During this time, there are false prophets in Judah that only prophesy peace and blessing. The wealthy people of Judah prefer to hear the false messages. They do not want to hear any prophecies that expose their faults or demand change.

So, the Lord challenges them: “Is the spirit of the LORD straitened? are these his doings?” (from v. 7). In other words, “Has the patience of the Lord run short? Are these His deeds?” The false prophets have been preaching messages of the Lord’s patience and long-suffering without preaching about His willingness to judge and discipline His people. When God established His covenant with Israel on Mount Sinai, He stated that He is “slow to anger” (Exodus 34:6, NLT). The belief that God is patient and forgiving was central to Israel’s theology. Many believe that love will prevent the Lord from punishing them, and false teachers of Micah’s time encourage this belief (v. 11). The people do not want to be confronted with their sin and prefer to continue in their wicked ways.

The Lord continues, “Do not my words do good to him that walketh uprightly?” The righteous have no fear of judgment; those who walk uprightly can expect to be rewarded. This also implies that judgment can be averted with a behavioral change. Judah, however, has not been walking uprightly; they have engaged in wicked behavior characterized by greed and covetousness. They evicted widows from their property and strip children of their inheritance. They take personal possessions from the unsuspecting and leave them with nothing. Instead of becoming instruments of the Lord’s justice, Judah has engaged in social violence toward the weak and vulnerable.

3. The Lies Invited (vv. 10–11)

The Lord gives His sentence against Judah: “Up! Begone! This is no longer your land and home, for you have filled it with sin and ruined it completely” (v. 10, NLT). The powerful land barons will be evicted from the very property they stole. In the same way that they stripped the poor, widows, and orphans of their lands and possessions, the Lord will strip them.

The people of Judah have no regard for the Lord’s message (v. 11). They prefer the false teachings of the prophets. Wine and strong drink represent prosperity. The people are looking for
someone who will give only messages of peace and prosperity, rather than change and judgment. Instead of the truth, they would rather hear lies. This is a definite sign that they are truly not interested in doing God’s will and seeking justice; they only seek their own selfish ends.

**Search the Scriptures**

1. How does the Lord punish Judah for their evil practices ([Micah 2:4–5](#))?  
2. What evil does the Lord judge them for ([vv. 8–9](#))?  
3. What is the message the people would like to hear ([v. 11](#))?  

**Discuss the Meaning**

1. Judah could not reconcile the Lord’s patience and His promise of judgment. How can we develop an accurate and balanced understanding of God as Righteous Judge and Loving Father?  
2. The people of Judah only wanted to hear words of prosperity. How can we make sure that we listen to all God’s words and not just what we want to hear?  

**Lesson in Our Society**

The effects of greed can be felt throughout our society. Corporations have crushed the lives of countless people in their quest to make a profit. As a society, we have sought luxuries at the expense of workers and their wages. We put our material comforts ahead of justice for others. God is not pleased with this. Instead of wanting to hear the truth, we would rather hear preachers tell us about how much more money we are going to get or what expensive house or car God is going to give us. The Lord wants us to repent of our evil ways so we can hear the truth and seek justice for the oppressed.

**Make It Happen**

Greed was the driving force behind Judah’s unjust ways. So often, the world prompts us to get all we can, even at the expense of others. Instead God calls us to seek out the welfare of the poor and weak. One way that we can do that is fight against modern slavery. Take some time to learn more about the conditions and what you can do at the “Not For Sale” website ([http://www.notforsalecampaign.org](http://www.notforsalecampaign.org)).

**Follow the Spirit**

What God wants me to do:
Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

More Light on the Text

**Micah 2:4–11**

4 In that day shall one take up a parable against you, and lament with a doleful lamentation, and say, We be utterly spoiled: he hath changed the portion of my people: how hath he removed it from me! turning away he hath divided our fields. 5 Therefore thou shalt have none that shall cast a cord by lot in the congregation of the LORD.

Beginning with verse 2, the prophet Micah presents a portrait of God’s reversal of Judah’s situation. In verses 1–2, the oppressing classes ruined others; they had used violence to deprive others of their possessions and take the fields of the poor. Now in verse 4, the tables are turned: the oppressors will become the oppressed, and their enemies will divide up their land. The Lord will take the fields away from the scheming land-grabbers in Israel and give them to the treacherous Assyrians. The rich had seized the fields of their helpless victims (v. 2); now the Lord will take those fields and turn them over to enemies. So the rich are dispossessed of their ill-gotten property. Micah quotes the rich as saying, “We be utterly spoiled: he hath changed the portion of my people: how hath he removed it from me!” When the disaster comes, the rich landowners will be mocked. “People will ridicule you” (NIV) is literally “he will lift up against you a parable.” The Hebrew word mashal (mah-SHAHL), translated as “parable,” is used here with the negative sense of a byword.

The prophet speaks on behalf of God (v. 5). He uses the word “therefore” to link this verse with the preceding verses, showing both the result and extent of the judgment. In the Old Testament, there were two ways in which land was returned to its original owner: first in the year of Jubilee (Leviticus 25), second by lot at the time of Joshua (Joshua 14:2), a practice that continued and was alluded to in Psalm 16:6 (KJV). The latter is what Micah refers to here. The families of the oppressors will have no representation. The punishment fits the crime. What a solemn warning against greed, materialism and oppression. Because the guilty parties have dealt with their neighbors’ fields unjustly, none of their descendants will be left in the Lord’s covenant community who can use a cord (measuring line) to divide up the land by lot. So they will be cut off from the promises of the Lord’s people. They will have no one to claim their inheritance, either because their family will be completely wiped out or they will all be in exile. People who
have a desperate greed for land and material wealth put their own desires far above the more basic needs of others, but such people will also learn the emptiness of riches, lands, and materials at their loss.

6 Prophesy ye not, say they to them that prophesy: they shall not prophesy to them, that they shall not take shame. 7 O thou that art named the house of Jacob, is the spirit of the LORD straitened? are these his doings? do not my words do good to him that walketh uprightly?

How true is the axiom that truth hurts! It is hardly surprising that Micah’s stern message to the rich did not bring him popularity. Instead, it aroused opposition and earned for him mockery and rebuke, just as it did for Isaiah (Isaiah 28:9–10, 30:9–11) and Amos (Amos 7:12–13). Micah’s audience, particularly the wealthy and land-grabbers, cannot accept his message. The message sounds offensive to them, so they command him to stop saying such things as he had said in 2:1–5. The verb used for prophesy is nataf (Heb., nah-TAHF), which means “to drip.” Used in this context, it has a connotation of driveling or foaming at the mouth. The false prophets are really telling the Lord’s prophets, “Stop foaming at the mouth,” which refers to ecstatic prophecy. Ironically, the false prophets are described as doing the same thing. In their rejection of the prophets’ message and the ensuing shame, the false prophets in fact mock themselves. The same is true today: charlatans reject all judgment, prophecy, and proclamation. They cannot believe that disaster and disgrace will overtake them because they think God will not do such things. It is, to them, a figment of Micah’s imagination, but they are wrong. The greedy oppressors are confident that no evil will trouble them. They believed that Micah is wrong when he says that God is devising evil against them and that the day will come when these swindlers will have no representative in the Lord’s assembly.

Micah’s opponents use rhetorical questions to say, “Do not even mention judgment. God is not annoyed.” The word katsar (Heb., kah-TSAR), translated “straitened,” literally means “short.” Here Micah turns the words of the evildoers against them by asking of the Lord is “short of spirit,” an idiom for “impatient” or “quick-tempered.” The false prophets are teaching erroneously that the Lord’s patience has no limits (cf. Exodus 34:6–7a). They cannot believe that the Lord would really lose His patience, especially with them. Surely, He must be able to put up easily with them despite their sins. So, they ask, “Is the Lord short-tempered,” “Does the Lord get angry quickly?” Without waiting for an answer, they ask another question, “Are these things that you say will happen the deeds of God?” The final question admits that God is righteous, but if this question comes from the mouths of the oppressors, it shows that they assume that they also
are among those who walk uprightly, and can thus expect that God will speak kindly to them. This assumption underlines their moral blindness. The point is that God’s words or promises cause good to happen to the one who walks uprightly.

8 Even of late my people is risen up as an enemy: ye pull off the robe with the garment from them that pass by securely as men averse from war. 9 The women of my people have ye cast out from their pleasant houses; from their children have ye taken away my glory for ever.

Micah continues to describe the offenses of his hearers. He lists the specific sins of the people. God calls them “my people.” However, their behavior does not reflect that of those who belong to God. It is a sad case of God’s people living ungodly lives. He says, “Even of late,” that is, only recently you have pulled off the robe of those who walked securely and men who were averse to war, a reference to the innocent and peaceful travellers. The women and children were not spared the humiliation and atrocities. The former were driven away from their houses, suggesting that these women might have been widows. The wealthy not only dispossessed women but also disinherited their children. Thus, the children are left without property, money, or security. Doubtless, a society cannot be in a lower state of morality than when it oppresses and exploits the vulnerable in it. Micah’s denouncements retain a pressing relevance in a world where such conditions continue. Covetousness and greed still have the same devastating results for defenseless women and children and the unprotected poor. For those who are called Christians, it is important that our character mirrors that of Christ.

10 Arise ye, and depart; for this is not your rest: because it is polluted, it shall destroy you, even with a sore destruction.

This verse takes up again the theme of verse 4 and announces the fate of the rich oppressors. The rich must get up and go into exile. The oppressors among God’s people rise up like an enemy to increase their wealth and power at the expense of others among their own people; now the Lord tells them to prepare to leave their ill-gotten land and possessions behind. They who had evicted others from their land are about to be evicted themselves; they will go away into exile. Their wrongfully acquired land will no longer be their possession. The reason is that they polluted (Heb. tame’, tah-MEH) the land which means to become unclean sexually, religiously, or ceremonially. As the Promised Land it was meant to be their resting place (Heb. menukahah, meh-noo-KHAH) but they had defiled it with their sins and ruined it beyond all remedy. Others will take over their property acquired by fraud and oppression.
If a man walking in the spirit and falsehood do lie, saying, I will prophesy unto thee of wine and of strong drink; he shall even be the prophet of this people.

The section ends in verse 11 as the prophet returns to practice of false prophecy. Micah says that his hearers are so deluded that if a preacher or prophet are to come along preaching the gospel of wine and strong drink, or prosperity gospel as it is known today, they will hire him immediately. Here, such a prophet is called a liar and deceiver, obviously because he does not tell the truth and so leads others astray. His message is one of peace and prosperity, “plenty of wine and beer” (NIV). The sinful, covenant-breaking people deserve that kind of prophet. Anyone who promises greater affluence will gain a hearing. False prophets are happy to oblige with “feel-good messages” so long as their hearers feed them and give them money (3:5, 11). The tests of true prophets are given in Deuteronomy 13:1–3, 18:17–22: A prophet’s message must not contradict or disagree with the previous revelation of truth through true prophets (cf. Isaiah 8:19–20), and his predictions must come true. These prophets fail on both counts.

Today there are still false prophets and teachers both inside and outside the church. In recent years, some preachers throughout the world have not only made predictions about the coming of the Lord but also about those who might be elected to certain political offices. Unfortunately they have been proven wrong. There are still swindlers and hucksters who “peddle the word of God for profit” (from 2 Corinthians 2:17, NIV). Jesus issued a warning about them (Matthew 24:4–5, 10–11, 23–24); so did Paul and John (1 Timothy 4:1–2; 1 John 2:18–19, 4:1–3). Such so-called ministers may masquerade as “apostles of Christ,” but in reality they are “false apostles” and servants of Satan (2 Corinthians 11:13–15). They will exist as long as there are people who “will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear” (from 2 Timothy 4:3, NIV).

Say It Correctly

Doleful. DOL-ful.

Averse. a-VERS.
Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY
Good Deeds for the Oppressed

(Job 29:7–17)

TUESDAY
Attention to the Needs of Others

(Job 31:13–22)

WEDNESDAY
Judge Me, O Lord

(Psalm 7:1–8)

THURSDAY
Test My Mind and Heart

(Psalm 7:9–17)

FRIDAY
The Lord Executes Judgment

(Psalm 9:15–20)

SATURDAY
The Righteous and the Wicked

(Proverbs 11:1–10)

SUNDAY
A Day of Bitter Lamentation

(Micah 2:4–11)