

# Corrupt Leaders

Bible Background • MICAH 3-6 | Printed Text • MICAH 3:1-3, 9-12; 6:6-8

Devotional Reading • ZECHARIAH 7:8-10; DEUTERONOMY 24:17-22

## Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will: UNDERSTAND God's requirements for people and leaders; VALUE justice, kindness, and humility as key human virtues; and DECIDE to be just, kind, and humble people and leaders.

## In Focus

On Monday morning, the headlines in many newspapers and reports on TV stated that an alderman in a major urban city was being indicted for taking bribes and kickbacks from companies and individuals who were seeking to do business with the city. All this came on the back of reports that priests across the country were being brought up on charges for sexually molesting minors for more than forty years.

Pastor Clarence addressed many of these issues with his congregation, but now he was preparing to speak at the semi-annual meeting of denominational leaders. He reminded them that leaders are expected to have compassion and respect for the people in their care. However, time and time again, greed and corruption have caused many to fall into a cesspool of crime and broken vows.

"Today, I want to remind you that God is not pleased when leaders refuse to lead by His standards and stand on His Word. Examine your own heart and actions to see if your motives in serving God and others are pleasing to Him. God does not want empty sacrifices but pure hearts that love Him and appreciate what He did on Calvary."

*In what ways are people capable of giving "empty sacrifices" to the Lord? How does this impact or reflect on their relationship with God?*

## Keep in Mind

"No, O people, the LORD has told you what is good, and this is what he requires of you: to do what is right, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God" (Micah 6:8, NLT).

## Words You Should Know

**A. Abhor** (v. 3:9) *ta'av* (Heb.) — To loathe, detest, or make abominable.

**B. Justly** (v. 6:8) *mishpat* (Heb.) — Justice, judgment, that which is right and has been laid down as proper practice in a lawful society.

## Say It Correctly

**A.** Jebusite. **JEB**-you-site.

**B.** Tyropoeon. **TIE**-row-**PEE**-on.

**C.** Hinum. **HUB**-num.

## KJV

Micah 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 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 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 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?

## NLT

Micah 3:1 I said, "Listen, you leaders of Israel! You are supposed to know right from wrong,

2 but you are the very ones who hate good and love evil. You skin my people alive and tear the flesh from their bones.

3 Yes, you eat my people's flesh, strip off their skin, and break their bones. You chop them up like meat for the cooking pot.

9 Listen to me, you leaders of Israel! You hate justice and twist all that is right.

10 You are building Jerusalem on a foundation of murder and corruption.

11 You rulers make decisions based on bribes; you priests teach God's laws only for a price; you prophets won't prophesy unless you are paid. Yet all of you claim to depend on the Lord. "No harm can come to us," you say, "for the Lord is here among us."

12 Because of you, Mount Zion will be plowed like an open field; Jerusalem will be reduced to ruins! A thicket will grow on the heights where the Temple now stands.

Micah 6:6 What can we bring to the Lord? Should we bring him burnt offerings? Should we bow before God Most High with offerings of yearling calves?

7 Should we offer him thousands of rams and ten thousand rivers of olive oil? Should we sacrifice our firstborn children to pay for our sins?

8 No, O people, the Lord has told you what is good, and this is what he requires of you: to do what is right, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God.

## The People, Places, and Times

**False Prophets.** While there were many true prophets in Israel, there were also false prophets. These false prophets often offered messages of hope and peace. These messages comforted the people without pointing out their sin or challenging them to repent from their evil ways. The false prophets became rich from the fees they charged for their services. These prophets chose to seek after money rather than speak God's truth to the people. They prophesied according to how much money their words might bring them. Often they would use pagan methods of divination or fortune-telling, which were strictly forbidden in the Law of the Old Testament (Deuteronomy 18:9–14). The Lord told Israel to evaluate false prophets to see if the message they had spoken came to pass (vv. 21–22) and if they enticed the people to worship idols (v. 20).

*What false prophets attempt to mislead the church today? How might profits corrupt a true prophet into a false one?*

## Background

Micah's prophecy began with a general announcement to Samaria and Jerusalem that God had a case to present against the nations of Israel and Judah. He then laid out the first of two series of judgments against the divided nation by describing the sins that they had committed against God as well as their fellow citizens. The Neo-Assyrian Empire was the dominant and real threat to Jerusalem during Micah's time. One of the many ways Jerusalem prepared for conflict was to strengthen the economy so they would have the necessary resources to fight off both foreign and domestic threats. But as today's text suggests, the ways they pursued economic stability were immoral and did not align with the precepts of the Lord. Their stimulus plan was based on greed, exploitation, and senseless taxes, and as a result, moral corruption slowly crept in. The rulers and leaders convinced themselves that their methods of governing were necessary because of the impending dangers; thus, treachery soon became merely business as usual. The culture of corruption and abuse spread, and soon landowners began taking advantage of farmers. The poor were subjugated, and they had no social or economic power. Individually and collectively, the nation claimed to depend on God, whom they knew and believed to be the ultimate lover of justice; however, the leaders were cynical and perverted righteousness.

*What should we do as Christians when we see corruption in our political or religious leaders?*

### At-A-Glance

1. Leader's Evil Desires (Micah 3:1–3)
2. Leaders' Corruption (vv. 9–12)
3. God's Call (6:6–8)

## In Depth

### 1. Leaders' Evil Desires (Micah 3:1–3)

The leaders of Israel—including government leaders, priests, prophets, business leaders, and more—had turned their hearts from God's will. They had been given God's covenantal law and were supposed to be examples of righteous behavior for all those around them. Yet they had perverted what was right and used their position to take advantage of those they were supposed to lead. Israel's leaders had neglected their duties and led the people astray. Rather than protecting and instructing their citizens, they exploited and misled them. Micah uses the image of cannibalism to describe how the leaders fed off those they were called to protect. Jerusalem's leaders are being accused of increasing their power by using violence and oppression.

### 2. Leaders' Corruption (vv. 9–12)

Amid all of this, Micah stands up for justice by the power of the Spirit of the Lord. The prophet accuses leaders of not just disobedience but of hating justice and perverting the very meaning of righteousness. Micah says the leaders are attempting to build up the city but at the expense of the poor. The false prophets are not the only corrupt citizens in Samaria and Jerusalem; leaders in almost every area of their society have gone astray. As a nation and individually for many leaders, the focus quickly became prosperity by any means necessary. Despite the fact that the nation had adopted a culture of cheating, lying, stealing, and marginalizing the poor, they profess that their "growth and success" is due to their dependence on and protection by God. Micah ends by telling people that the city they are working so hard to build will ultimately be destroyed.

### 3. God's Call (6:6–8)

What can Israel do to correct its broken relationship with God? Their immediate response would be to offer the traditional burnt offerings as sacrifices to God. The prophet points out that no matter how much they give, God won't be pleased. Even the offer of human sacrifice, which was customary of pagan sacrifice but prohibited by the covenant law (Leviticus 18:21; 20:2–5) is suggested to show how ridiculous and insulting their erroneous attempts were. Micah's prophecy, in keeping with other Israelite prophecies, clearly indicates that the inward condition of one's heart and the importance of acting justly towards neighbors are of more concern to God than outward religiosity. God doesn't require outrageous sacrifice; He has already said what He requires. As communicated earlier in Micah's prophecy, God requires that His people would once again be a just society that loves mercy. He desires protection for the oppressed and poor. He desires that His people act mercifully toward one another. God requires that they (and we) continue to walk in covenant fellowship with Him.

#### Search the Scriptures

1. Based on Micah's prophecy, what was the primary source of motivation during this period in Jerusalem (3:11)?
2. What outward religious activities did Israel think would please God (vv. 6–7)?
3. What sacrifices does God require (6:8)?

#### Discuss the Meaning

1. What makes a leader corrupt? Be sure to consider thoughts, words, and actions.
2. Micah's message to the people indicated that God is more concerned with the inward state of one's heart than outward shows of piety. What causes us to try to look outwardly spiritual while secretly knowing that we're out of step with God's will?

#### Liberating Lesson

Discuss modern leaders and whether they are models of justice and humility. List and discuss God's requirements for people and leaders. Have participants write a litany of commitment to become just, kind, and humble people and leaders. If you can share this litany in a worship service, be sure to include acts of appreciation for leaders in the congregation whose lives demonstrate what God requires.

#### Application for Activation

Justice work is not a cultural phenomenon but a biblical requirement. Micah reminds the believer that the Lord requires us "to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly" with God (Micah 6:8). As a group, create a list of potential justice issues that exist within the area where your congregation is situated. Expand the list by discussing major justice issues in your city and state. Now discuss justice issues that interest the group on a national level. From your list, select one local, state, and national issue and discuss practical ways that the congregation can be proactive in "lending a voice" and resources to these causes.

#### Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

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#### Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

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## More Light on the Text

### Micah 3:1–3, 9–12; 6:6–8

The prophet Micah, a contemporary of Isaiah, speaks to the Southern Kingdom of Judah. At this time, the Northern Kingdom of Israel has been under threat of destruction and will eventually fall into the hands of the Assyrians in 722 BC. Micah's warning to Judah is that the same could happen to them if they continue in their evil ways.

**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.**

The book of Micah is a prophetic judgment against the royal family and other leaders in Judah during the reigns of kings Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah as well as those who support them. Micah is accusing these leaders of treating the people badly, as though they are meat. The leaders of both nations are taking from the poor and oppressed in order to make themselves wealthy in a kingdom of utter corruption. They are so corrupt that those who try to do good are despised while those who do evil are celebrated. The prophet intentionally exaggerates the violence of the times in the same way that someone who feels used or taken advantage of might say someone “took the shirt off my back” (vv. 2–3). In this case, the corrupt leaders are accused of being even worse, taking the flesh off people's bones and using them as stew meat to feed themselves. Greed rules the day in a way that values profits over human lives.

**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.**

Micah particularly addresses the political and religious groups of Judah. He calls out the heads and princes responsible for establishing the religious and political moral standards for the people. The Lord, through Micah, accuses them of hating or abhorring what is just. The word “abhor,” (Heb. ta'av, tah-AHV, to loathe, detest, or make abominable) is a strong indication of how far those who rule over the Israelites have fallen from God. They are not instructing people with fairness but seeking their own gain and pursuing personal agendas. Not only do these rulers and chiefs abhor justice, but they also pervert “equity” (Heb. yashar, yah-SHAR, that which is straight, right, or just). This word also denotes fairness and being honest and aboveboard. Those who rule over Judah do not practice such honesty.

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

The prophet continues to personalize the accusation against Judah. In the name of religion and sacrifice to God, the people have erected buildings using perverse and deceitful means. Instead of using tithes and offerings to establish places of worship, the religious leaders have taken from the poor and, in some instances, killed to expand Jerusalem. Archaeology testifies to the building activities underway in Jerusalem during Micah's prophecy to build themselves up against the coming Assyrian invasion. Such capital activities are performed at the expense of the oppressed and less fortunate. Jeremiah makes reference to similar activities, mentioning those who build their homes by unrighteousness (22:13). The prophet Habakkuk also records official building with bloodshed (2:12). The name “Zion” refers to the hill between the Kidron and Tyropoeon valleys that David captured from the Jebusites (2 Samuel 5:7). The city of Jerusalem by Micah's time also includes a second hill, Moriah, between the Tyropoeon and Hinnom valleys. After the building of the temple to the north of the hill of Zion, it became the center of the Lord's activity, since the Temple was where Yahweh dwelt. The term “Zion” may refer specifically to the Temple vicinity or Jerusalem in general. Thus, Micah's reference to the people building Zion up with blood shows how this holy habitation has been defamed and desecrated.

**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.**

Micah again compels Judah to reexamine its political and social ethics. The rulers who govern civic and state affairs are corrupt. The priests who dictate religious standards practice evil. The prophets who speak the Word of the Lord only do it for money. Micah contends that Judah's leadership has turned away from the Lord. Those in power only want to be compensated by their subjects for what God has gifted and instructed them to do. Rulers give judgment for a bribe, priests teach for a price, and prophets give oracles for money. Micah stresses the greed and insatiable materialism pervading Judah. These leaders, however, believe that what they do is good and pleasing in the eyes of the Lord. They are convinced that since Zion is the dwelling place of God and that since the Hebrews are God's chosen people, all is well, and their transgressions can be overlooked. Speaking rhetorically, Micah states that those in authority do not lean on the Lord. The word "lean" (Heb. sha'an, shah-AWN), means to lie, rely on, or rest on, often with reference to God (2 Chronicles 14:11). Isaiah uses another verb for leaning in, stating how Judah must depend on God (48:2). Such leaning implies a need to find favor and obtain support. Judah wishes to engage in wrongdoing while claiming to depend on the Lord for safety. The leaders, despite their unscrupulous conduct, believe that God will protect them because of His faithfulness and promises. The people do not see the error of their ways. They are so obstinate and spiritually blind that they are convinced that because the Lord dwells in Zion, no harm can come to them, even when they sin against God. These leaders mistake leniency for indulgence. God is patiently waiting for and encouraging them through His prophets to return to keeping the Law. In the meantime, He is being lenient, holding off the proper punishment for their crimes. The Israelites interpret this holding off of punishment, however, as a mitigation of punishment. They think they have escaped the consequences of their actions.

**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 in the forest.**

Because Judah has become prideful and sinful, the Lord, through Micah, predicts its ensuing destruction. The crassness of the leaders will result in the leveling of Jerusalem and its Temple. Micah made a similar pronouncement earlier stating that Samaria would be a heap and a place for planting vineyards, that is, an unused, open land (1:6). This prophecy is remembered a century later when the people of Israel observe its fulfillment (Jeremiah 26:18–19). Both prophets foretell the captivity of Judah by the Babylonians and the exile afterward. Judah, during Micah's time, is already a vassal state of the Assyrians; further enslavement is the next step. Again, the prophet specifically names Zion and Jerusalem, the center of Israelite worship, as places to be destroyed. Micah personalizes the message and the plans of God to show Judah's leaders their ill behavior. No place is beyond God's wrath when evil has been committed. The Israelites perhaps had hoped that God's desire to preserve the honor of His own name would outweigh His desire to let Israel feel the consequences of their actions. Various times before, righteous Israelites had pleaded with God to spare punishment so that other nations would not think that God was not powerful enough to protect His people (Exodus 32:9–14). God's people now use this mercy as an excuse to continue in unrighteous action.

**6:6 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 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?**

Micah 6:1–8 is written like a court trial between God and Israel. In the rhetorical trial, first God takes the side of the defendant. God asks them what He has done that would cause the people of Israel to turn their backs on him? What did God do that would make them pursue wickedness instead of righteousness? He invites Israel to bring witnesses to testify against Him, whether from nature or their history together. God uses the opportunity to point out His history of doing great works in His covenant with Israel, from creation through the Exodus and beyond. God had blessed and protected them. God was not guilty.

Then Micah's prophecy switches sides. If God is not guilty, then Israel must pay restitution to God. They must give God what He is owed for their injustice against Him. They are the ones who failed in keeping the covenant, not God. Verse 6 continues the metaphor of sentencing in this court trial. What do the Israelites owe God for what they have done? Does God want offerings of calves or rams? An exaggerated number is given to show not only how deep the debt is to God for sin, but also how much they could try to pay to please God. The exaggerated amount to be given continues with rivers of olive oil or even their children to atone for their sins.

We know as believers that nothing we could give God could atone for our sin—the debt is too great. Israel is in a position to lose the case and be unable to pay damages for violating the covenant. Then God tells them what He wants (v. 8). He wants them to do justly, be merciful, and walk in humility with Him. The Hebrew word translated “justly” here is mishpat (meesh- POT), which is also translated justice, judgment, and law. It refers to that which is right and has been laid down as proper practice in a lawful society. God's first answer to how they should pay restitution is to look at what He has already told them. Just do the Law that He has already revealed to them. It is not a great mystery or too hard (cf. Deuteronomy 30:11–14). Secondly, they are to love “mercy” (Heb. khesed, KHEsed), which is also translated loving-kindness and goodness. In many ways, it is the Hebrew equivalent of agape (Gk. ah-GAH-pay), which is unconditional, divine love (1 Corinthians 13). Lastly, they are to walk (Heb. halak, ha-LOCK, here: to live one's life) humbly (Heb. tsana', tsaw- NAH). In an honor-shame society as the ancient Mediterranean, where social regard was based on where you fit in a rigid hierarchy, humility could very easily be misunderstood as shame. Voluntarily and overtly living your life to show you were subservient to another was unheard of in neighboring nations. But this is just how God expects the Israelites to behave. However, in God's great mercy, when we are humble and do not think of ourselves as higher than we are, He humbles Himself too, to walk “with” us. God requires obedience in our relationship with Him. Obedience to God is better than sacrifices (1 Samuel 15:22). God wants His people to pursue justice, care for the poor, and be merciful—meaning nonjudgmental and patient with others, the same way He is patient with us. God wants us to recognize we are all sinful and make mistakes. He also wants us to receive His grace in humility. We do not deserve God's grace. The debt of our sin is too great to repay God. So God gives this “second chance” to Israel to obey Him and keep His covenant. The covenant calls for justice, mercy, and humility. It is summed up as love God and our neighbors as ourselves. We must obey as living sacrifices because we cannot atone with material sacrifices.

This same sentiment is prophesied again in Jeremiah 7:21–23 which happens one hundred years later. God is giving Judah an opportunity to repent and be faithful here in Micah during the reign of King Hezekiah after the Northern Kingdom of Israel had fallen. They repent for a time but then are unfaithful again and eventually face God's judgment when the Southern Kingdom of Judah is destroyed by Babylon during Jeremiah's lifetime. Israel still is not able to be righteous after this chance God gives them to get it right. Like all of us, they sin again by not living justly, being merciful, and walking with God in humility. They do not keep God's covenant, and their sin debt is still hanging over their heads. It is because of that debt of sin and the need for righteousness to please God that we need salvation through Jesus Christ. Jesus comes as the one who perfectly keeps the law of justice, mercy, and humility. Jesus then gives His life and releases us from our debt of sin. He bears witness of how to live justly for God and then empowers us to do the same.

# Daily Bible Readings

## **MONDAY**

The Lord Acts Justly  
(Psalm 146)

## **TUESDAY**

The Results of Social Injustice  
(Isaiah 5:18-24)

## **WEDNESDAY**

Justice Actions By The Expected Messiah  
(Isaiah 11:1-5)

## **THURSDAY**

Prophets Fail On Their Watch  
(Micah 3:5-8)

## **FRIDAY**

Remember God's Righteous Actions  
(Micah 3:5-8)

## **SATURDAY**

Cheating and Violence Will Be Punished  
(Micah 6:9-16)

## **SUNDAY**

God Requires Justice For All  
(Micah 3:1-3, 9-12; 6:6-8)