

International Sunday School Lesson
Study Notes
July 12, 2015

Lesson Text: Micah 3:5-12

Lesson Title: Condemnation of Corruption

Introduction

In his brief prophecy Micah touched on many sinful actions in the nation of Judah. It is evident how the people and their leaders, political and religious, had failed to live and administer justice in harmony with God's will. Everything Micah points to was a clear violation of what God had revealed through Moses centuries earlier.

The accusations from Micah in his second message (Micah 3:1-5:15) centers around unjust rulers. The prophet addressed an intense question to them: *"Is it not for you to know judgment?"* (Micah 3:1). Was not this the reason for holding the positions of leadership and responsibility they had? They had been put in positions of authority and leadership to serve the people and administer justice to all. Instead, they abused their offices and robbed the people they were supposed to be protecting (Micah 3:2).

Micah is not content to sit idly by while Judah is destroyed by corruption and sin. Micah uses the imagery of cannibalism to describe the actions of the national leaders (Micah 3:3). *"Who eat the flesh of my people"* (Micah 3:3) is a graphic metaphor designed at awakening the conscience of these heartless reprobates.

Commenting on Micah 3:3, Doctor Warren W. Wiersbe writes, *"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 (Micah 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."*

The comparison between the political and religious leadership of Judah and America is frightening. Micah's words describe exactly what is happening in our beloved country. America's leaders were elected and given authority to administer justice and serve the people. Yet, that is no longer the case. Judicial decisions that should be based on law are now made based on political preference. Like the corrupt leaders in Micah's day, our leaders are "cannibalizing" their own people! What could be more ravenous than killing an unborn baby in the womb or tearing down the sanctity of marriage?

Judgment on the False Prophets (Micah 3:5-8)

Verse 5

“Thus saith the LORD concerning the prophets that make my people err, that bite with their teeth, and cry, Peace; and he that putteth not into their mouths, they even prepare war against him.”

The words, “Thus saith the LORD” is also used in Micah 2:3 and are used over four hundred times in the Old Testament. The words mean what is about to be heard are not the speaking prophet’s words, but God Himself speaking through the prophet.

“Thus saith the LORD concerning the prophets that make my people err” is Micah saying, “Here is God’s message to the false prophets and preachers who lie to my people and cause my people to “err.” “Err” means “wander or stray” from the Lord. Micah is giving us a working definition of a false prophet. Pay close attention because our world is full of them! False prophets always lead God’s people away from God while giving them the sense that they are helping them stay close to God (Isaiah 3:12; Hosea 4:12).

“That bite with their teeth” speaks of the greed of the false prophets. They always want something to “bite” on, something to eat or satisfy themselves. They also “cry” or proclaim “peace.” If the price is right they will shower you with messages guaranteed to make you feel good about your sin and yourself. What they are actually doing is tickling your ears (2 Timothy 4:3-4).

“He that putteth not into their mouths, they even prepare war against him.” These false prophets declare “war” on anyone who are not paying the price to keep them satisfied. This is a clear case of holy blackmail! Religious programing is filled with false prophets who will do anything for you as long as you send your money to fill their mouths! They are nothing more that religious pyramid schemes designed to make them rich and you dependent upon them. Corrupt government and false religion have a lot in common.

After the fall of Jerusalem, Jeremiah analyzed the role the false prophets played in Judah’s defeat. He writes, “*A wonderful and horrible thing is committed in the land; The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means; and my people love to have it so: and what will ye do in the end thereof*” (Jeremiah 5:30-31). In his lamentations he also writes, “*Thy prophets have seen vain and foolish things for thee: and they have not discovered thine iniquity, to turn away thy captivity; but have seen for thee false burdens and causes of banishment*” (Lamentations 2:14).

Verse 6

“Therefore night shall be unto you, that ye shall not have a vision; and it shall be dark unto you, that ye shall not divine; and the sun shall go down over the prophets, and the day shall be dark over them.”

“Therefore,” is a word of conclusion. In view of the false prophets leading the people astray, “night shall be unto you, that ye shall not have a vision.” Those who have abused their calling as God’s prophets are destined to be stopped from prophesying. If a man is called to preach and fails to preach, God will see to it that he cannot preach! “Night” means darkness and darkness emphasizes no revelation from God. The false prophet will “not have a vision.” No “vision” means no word from God for these prophets.

“That ye shall not divine” means even their occult techniques and practices will be fruitless. False prophets often dabble in the occult which was always forbidden by God (Deuteronomy 18:10). They were known for predicting the future. Even that will come to an end because the false prophets themselves will be in the very captivity which they said would not happen (Jeremiah 27:9).

“The sun shall go down over the prophets, and the day shall be dark over them.” God does not give His light to false prophets. “Darkness” is a metaphor for God’s judgment. “And the day shall be dark over them” means that when disaster and judgment come, they will have no answer from God.

Note: When people and nations ignore the men of God, who preach the word of God, they will eventually lose a word from God. Who can doubt that this judgment is upon America and the church? People spend countless hours surfing the web and never open their Bible to read or study. The church has lost a word from God and like Samson, she is not even aware it is gone (2 Samuel 17:4). It has been replaced with entertainment, singing, and felt needs preaching. The sun has went down and the day is dark over us.

Verse 7

“Then shall the seers be ashamed, and the diviners confounded: yea, they shall all cover their lips; for there is no answer of God.”

“Seer” is another word for prophet. Micah says the “seers” will “be ashamed.” “Ashamed” means “pale” or “blushed.” The true prophets had predicted judgment was coming. When it does, the “seers” or those false prophets who prophesied they saw peace in Judah’s future, will be “ashamed” and “confounded.” They will be embarrassed, disgraced, and humiliated.

“They shall cover their lips; for there is no answer of God” is poetic justice! The very organ they used to prophesy lies is now the organ they will cover. To “cover the lip” was a sign of shame and sorrow (Ezekiel 24:17, 22). The false prophets will be left speechless and with no answers. If you removed the high

definition television cameras and the large offerings sent to the false prophets, they too would be speechless and have no answer.

Verse 8

“But truly I am full of power by the spirit of the LORD, and of judgment, and of might, to declare unto Jacob his transgression, and to Israel his sin.”

In contrast to the false prophets, Micah describes himself as “full of power by the spirit of the LORD...” Micah is not saying he is wiser or smarter than the false prophets. He wants Judah to recognize that God has given him “power by the spirit of the LORD” to prophesy truth to them. He is aware that in himself he is only a man. The word “power” means “strength” and “might.” It describes a supernatural strength and might to stand up against opposition and discouragement. Without God’s “power” none of us can fulfill our calling.

Micah is also full “of judgment, and of might.” The “judgment” or justice of the prophet overcame the injustice of the leaders. His “might” or courage enabled him to fearlessly rebuke the people for their sins and warn of coming judgment. The word “might” is commonly associated with warfare. The task of preaching and teaching God’s truth is definitely a spiritual battle.

Micah’s calling was to “declare” or “make known” the “transgressions of Jacob” and the “sins of Israel” (Isaiah 58:1). Micah’s calling was the same as the calling of the God-called preacher today (2 Timothy 4:2). He was to declare “transgressions” and “sin.” The nation was so bad it took two words to describe their lawlessness. “Transgressions” refers to their acts of rebellion while “sin” refers to their offences toward God. A true man of God always warns people of their lawlessness and offenses toward God.

Judgment on the Leaders of Jerusalem (Micah 3:9-12)

Verse 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.”

The first part of this verse is word for word to the beginning of Micah 3:1. Micah is calling upon the “heads of the house of Jacob” and the “princes of the house of Israel” to “hear” what he is about to say. The “heads of the house of Jacob” and the “princes of the house of Israel” are the leaders of the nation, most likely the judges and magistrates. These “civil servants” were “abhorring judgment” and “perverting equity.” “Abhor” means to despise, detest, and degrade.” They had a contempt for justice and a low opinion of the value of God’s demands.

“Pervert” means to twist or make crooked. “Equity” is that which is straight or upright. Most uses of the word “equity” refers to what is right in an ethical sense and thus describes what is moral and righteous. The “heads” of the people and the “princes” of the government had twisted what is right giving it a new definition. In other words, they were calling what is wrong right and what is right wrong (Judges 17:6).

Note: If the Bible declares same-sex marriage an abomination and unnatural (Leviticus 18:22; Romans 1:27) and you do not accept that, but instead re-define it as love and acceptable. Then you are calling wrong right and right wrong. That is what they did in Micah’s day!

Verse 10

“They build up Zion with blood, and Jerusalem with iniquity.”

The corrupt leaders of Judah were “building up Zion with blood.” The word “build” means to build again or remake. It is similar to the word “change” that Americans often hear from politicians. “Zion” and “Jerusalem” were getting a load of urban renewal that was costing them their lives! America is going through some changes that is costing us the very life of our nation and is killing the family.

“Blood” is the Hebrew word *dam* {dawn}. It refers to “that which when shed causes death.” The leaders of “Zion” and “Jerusalem” were remaking the holy city while killing the people in the process. These leaders were out to get what they wanted and they did not care who died in the process.

They were also “building Jerusalem with iniquity.” “Iniquity” is injustice or unrighteousness. “Jerusalem” was being “built” on that which was morally perverted, warped, and twisted.

Note: If a politician wants to be elected or re-elected in America, killing a baby in the womb or destroying the sanctity of marriage is no problem. If Christians get in their way, remove them. What was happening in Micah’s day is still happening today.

Verse 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 mentions the “heads,” the “priests,” and the “prophets.” This is a reference to Jerusalem’s leaders. The “heads” were the judges who heard and determined cases. The “priests” were men who should have impartially declared

God's law. The "prophets" were men called to deliver God's message. All three were corrupted by favors or monetary gain.

The "heads" judged for "reward." "Reward" refers to a bribe. It refers to something given to a person to influence them to act or think in a certain way. The "priests" taught for "hire." The word means "they had their price." It means the priests would only teach those who paid them and it meant that money was exchanged for certain interpretations of the law. The "prophets divine" or practiced soothsaying for "money." "Prophets" were to deliver God's message and warn of judgment. Instead these "prophets" were the Old Testament version of many modern day "televangelist" who sell prayer shawls, miracle water, and guaranteed financial harvest if you sow your seed in their ministry. The prophet Isaiah describes them like this: *"His watchmen are blind: they are all ignorant, they are all dumb dogs, they cannot bark; sleeping, lying down, loving to slumber. Yea, they are greedy dogs which can never have enough, and they are shepherds that cannot understand: they all look to their own way, every one for his gain, from his quarter. Come ye, say they, I will fetch wine, and we will fill ourselves with strong drink; and to morrow shall be as this day, and much more abundant"* (Isaiah 56:10-11).

"Yet will they lean upon the LORD, and say, Is not the LORD among us? none evil can come upon us." "They" means all three groups. While judges, priests, and prophets fleece the people and corrupt the land, they presumptuously "lean upon the LORD" and flatter themselves by saying, "Is not the LORD among us?"

Sin deceives! Nations such as Judah and America violate God's Word and every moral standard imaginable while professing to be "leaning upon the LORD." Churches ignore God's standard of righteousness, preach a social gospel void of truth and then profess to be leaning on the Lord. All the while believing "none evil can come upon us."

Note: I am afraid many Christians have the same attitude. "If conservative Christians are judged, then who will defend the unborn, the sanctity of marriage, or preach the true gospel?" We ask in hopes that no matter how wicked our nation becomes we will not suffer the consequences. We must be careful thinking that way lest we conclude "none evil can come upon us."

Verse 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."

"Therefore" means Micah concludes that the punishment will fit the crime. As a nation's leaders go, so goes the nation.

“Zion for your sake” or on account of you. Because of corrupt leaders, “Zion” will “be plowed as a field, and Jerusalem shall become heaps, and the mountain of the house as the high places of the forest.” “Zion” is the easternmost ridge of Jerusalem and is used here as a synonym for the city of Jerusalem. “Plowed as a field” means she will be wiped clean! What a shock to be told that the holy city would experience such destruction.

The city of “Jerusalem shall become heaps.” “Heaps” describes a pile of rubbish, like a pile of useless trash or garbage. The “mountain of the house as the high places of the forest” describes the Temple Mount area. It will become a “place of the forest” or overgrown with trees. The beautiful magnificent Temple will be grown over with trees like an abandoned cabin.

Conclusion

This is Micah’s prophesy. The false prophets were causing God’s people to wander and stray from the Lord and the corrupt leadership could be bought or bribed. He pictured the holy city of Jerusalem plowed under and piled up like left behind trash. The beautiful Temple would be overgrown with trees. It was a sobering message indeed. The people and leaders of Judah may not have believed what Micah was preaching but the prophet Jeremiah did. He said, *“Micah the Morasthite prophesied in the days of Hezekiah king of Judah, and spake to all the people of Judah, saying, Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Zion shall be plowed like a field, and Jerusalem shall become heaps, and the mountain of the house as the high places of a forest”* (Jeremiah 26:18). Notice Jeremiah said, *“Thus saith the LORD of hosts...”* That means Jeremiah viewed Micah’s words as inspired of God.

Judgment did not immediately come to Judah and Jerusalem. About a hundred years would pass before Micah’s words would be fulfilled. Nevertheless, Micah’s prophesy came true. God’s Word always does.

What about you? Who do you believe? Do you believe those who preach prosperity and health? Do you believe the national and religious leaders who can be bribed and bought? Or do you believe God’s man when he preaches God’s Word?

Micah’s words deserve to be taken seriously by our generation. He warns us against the complacency that causes us to think we are leaning on the Lord while we are actually violating His Word. He also warns us about accepting His love and rejecting His lordship. We must not live under the illusion that just because we are Christians we are relieved from accountability for our nation’s sins.

Amen.