

## God Hates Injustice (What God Hates, part 2)

Micah 3:1-12 on August 4, 2024

Ps Jerry's sermon notes for 8/4/2024

*Please read Micah 3:1-12 before going further in this transcript.*

Last Sunday we began our sermon series on the OT book of Micah. Today, we'll finish part two of "What God Hates," and then we'll move on for the final two weeks with "What God Delights In."

**If we are truly devoted to God's love and goodness, then we must learn to hate what God hates.**

Micah 3:1-2 begins, "...Listen, you leaders of Jacob, you rulers of Israel. Should you not embrace justice, you who hate good and love evil...." You see, Israel's leaders had it backwards, they hatred good rather than hating evil, and they loved evil rather than loving good.<sup>1</sup> We've got ourselves a major problem when God's people don't hate what God hates! Last week we considered a quote from New Testament scholar John Stott: "[Love] is discerning. It is so passionately devoted to the object being loved, that it hates every evil which is incompatible."<sup>2</sup> Friend, if we're truly devoted to God's love and goodness, then we should hate what He hates. And one of the things that our Heavenly Father absolutely hates... is injustice!

**God hates injustice...**

**1) In corrupt judges, and community and government leaders.**

In Micah 3:1-2 the prophet asks, "...Listen, you leaders of Jacob, you rulers of Israel.<sup>3</sup> Should you not embrace justice, you who hate good and love evil...." This question from verse 1 introduces the theme of justice in chapter 3, which is then repeated again in verse 8 and 9,<sup>4</sup> Micah 3:8 mentions, "...with justice and might...." Micah 3:9 echoes verse 1, "Hear this, you leaders of Jacob, you rulers of Israel, who despise justice and distort all that is right." Before we go any further, we should remember to be careful how we draw parallels between the Old Testament theocratic system of law, and our own modern-day, secular system of law. That said, there are many overlapping principles of justice, and for distinguishing between right and wrong.<sup>5</sup> Micah's focus in chapter 3 begins by referring to

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<sup>1</sup> Consider Romans 12:19 and Psalm 97:10. See Amos 5:14-15 and 1 Thessalonians 5:21-22.

<sup>2</sup> John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Romans*, Rev. Ed., IVP, Downers Grove, IL, 1994, p. 332.

<sup>3</sup> In contrast to chapter 1, Jacob and Israel both refer to the southern kingdom of Judah here, but would also include any refugees from the northern kingdom who had fled to the south. It's rather confusing, but sometimes Israel can refer specifically to the northern kingdom. Other times, the name is used for the southern kingdom. And occasionally it is used to refer to the entire covenant people of Israel. We need to look at the context to determine which it is. *NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, p. 1504 footnote on Micah 3:1.

<sup>4</sup> Justice is a key word that links together the flow of thought in Micah chapter 3, verses 1,8,9. See Kenneth L. Barker, *The New American Commentary: Micah*, Broadman, Nashville, TN, 1999, p. 81.

<sup>5</sup> In fact, much of our modern-day law and order is based on Judean-Christian values right out of the Bible, both old and new testaments.

the community and government leaders of Israel, which would include their judges and various civil authorities. As some of God's key leaders in the nation of Israel, they should have been doing what verse 1 suggests: "Should you not embrace justice!?" However, as verse 9 points out, they were despising justice and distorting what was right.<sup>6</sup>

Consider God's expectation of His people in Zechariah 8:16-17, "These are the things you are to do: Speak the truth to each other, and render true and sound judgment in your courts; do not plot evil against each other, and do not love to swear falsely. I hate all this," declares the LORD." God absolutely loves it when we speak the truth to each other and render true and sound judgment in our courts. But He absolutely hates it, when we plot evil against each other, and commit perjury by swearing falsely. God hates injustice! There's a great responsibility that comes with positions of leadership, and these leaders in Micah 3, were abusing their power by embracing injustice.<sup>7</sup> In fact, they were using their power to skin people alive!

Micah 3:2-3 goes on, "...you who hate good and love evil; who tear the skin from my people and the flesh from their bones; who eat my people's flesh, strip off their skin and break their bones in pieces; who chop them up like meat for the pan, like flesh for the pot?" Now verses 2-3 are only figures of speech, so this isn't referring to literal acts of cannibalism, but it is meant to jolt us awake! This word picture is meant to shock us, and get our attention so that we'll recognize just how truly terrible, injustice is. Injustice has a way of treating human beings in the most cruel and demeaning ways, without any regard to their human dignity, or any appreciation for how every man, woman, and child is made in God's image. The leaders and rulers who Micah is rebuking, were treating the common folk like cannon fodder, like dispensable pawns on their chessboard.

Notice how Micah takes these despicable acts of injustice personally, calling these victims "my people." Throughout Israel's history, a common word picture for leaders was a shepherd, someone who would protect and provide for the flock. In stark contrast, these particular leaders are depicted as cannibals, eating and destroying the flock.<sup>8</sup> Verses 2-3 don't give us any specific examples of exactly what Micah is referring to, but we can only imagine that it must have been pretty bad to be depicted this way. We're

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<sup>6</sup> More than likely, they campaigned on a platform of righteousness and justice. But now they were betraying the leadership mantle which was entrusted to them. This is not all that different than some of the politics that you and I have witnessed throughout our lifetimes. Let me be clear, I'm not referring to any particular political party or government leader; I'm simply referring to what most of us expect from ANY leader, at ANY time in history. Whichever leader happens to be in power, at any particular time, is expected to lead justly. (ESPECIALLY if that leader is leading God's people.)

<sup>7</sup> In the words of Spider-man, "with great power comes great responsibility."

<sup>8</sup> Consider Ezekiel 34:1-10; and Zechariah 11:15-17.

given a few clues as to the specifics, from the broader context of his book. One chapter earlier, in Micah 2:1-2, he describes injustice this way: “Woe to those who plan iniquity, to those who plot evil on their beds! At morning’s light they carry it out because it is in their power to do it. They covet fields and seize them, and houses, and take them. They defraud people of their homes, they rob them of their inheritance.” Who has the power to take away people’s land and houses? Well, most likely the people who are in power: Israel’s leaders and rulers. They were taking away people’s fields, which was their livelihood, their way of making money and supporting their loved ones. They were defrauding people of their homes, taking away the very roof over their heads.

Micah 7:3 later declares, “Both hands are skilled in doing evil; the ruler demands gifts, the judge accepts bribes, the powerful dictate what they desire—they all conspire together.” These leaders, who should have been conspiring together for justice, to serve the good of the people, were instead serving the good of themselves, by conspiring to do evil. They selfishly used their power to increase their own wealth, and to provide for their own desires. The good news is that God hates injustice, so He’s not ignoring what’s going on. God sees the things that we’re reading about here. Micah 3:4 then predicts the judgment these leaders will receive, “Then they [these corrupt leaders] will cry out to the LORD, but he will not answer them. At that time he will hide his face from them because of the evil they have done.” “Then” and “At that time” refer to the coming invasion of armies into Israel. Then, and only then, will these corrupt leaders finally turn to the Lord in earnest. But their evil behavior has earned them a harsh punishment: the silence of God. When they finally cry out to the LORD, He will not answer; God will hide His face from them because of the evil they’ve done. God will not be mocked, and used like some sort of a cosmic vending machine when it’s convenient for these leaders. Their corrupt and unjust disobedience to God’s ways will separate them from God – which is exactly what sin does.

Tragically, it isn’t just Israel’s corrupt judges, and community and government leaders, who’ve embraced injustice, it’s also many of the spiritual leaders as well.

**God hates injustice...**

**2) In greedy and ungodly spiritual leaders.**

Micah 3:5-6 go on, “This is what the LORD says: “As for the prophets who lead my people astray, they proclaim ‘peace’ if they have something to eat, but prepare to wage war against anyone who refuses to feed them.

Therefore night will come over you, without visions, and darkness, without divination. The sun will set for the prophets, and the day will go dark for them.” We looked at these false prophets a bit last week; they perverted

true religion with their falsehood. They'd tell people whatever they wanted to hear, as long as it made them money, as long as it provided them with something to eat. These spiritual leaders suffer the same fate as the leaders we just looked at: the silence of God. Instead of receiving visions and spiritual insights from God, there will be darkness. Micah 3:7 says, "The seers will be ashamed and the diviners disgraced. They will all cover their faces because there is no answer from God." "No answer from God." They're covering their faces "in shame and humiliation," because now they're no longer able to give God's people spiritual direction.<sup>9</sup> Everything had gone dark for them because they became preachers for profit, rather than for preachers for God.

God's true profit stands in stark contrast. In Micah 3:8, he says, "But as for me, I am filled with power, with the Spirit of the LORD, and with justice and might, to declare to Jacob his transgression, to Israel his sin." Micah is in step with God's Spirit, so there's no shameful darkness or disgrace for him. Micah was God's chosen instrument to declare His message with justice and might.<sup>10</sup> Micah is filled with justice. In the midst of these other leaders who despise justice, Micah declares it. In the midst of these corrupt leaders distorting all that is right, Micah declares all that is wrong. Micah calls out their sin for what it is.<sup>11 12</sup>

Verses 9-11 go on, "Hear this, you leaders of Jacob, you rulers of Israel, who despise justice and distort all that is right; 10 who build Zion with bloodshed, and Jerusalem with wickedness. 11 Her leaders judge for a bribe, her priests teach for a price, and her prophets tell fortunes for money...." In verse 10, this word "Zion" is another way of referring to Jerusalem, but "Zion" was intended to represent something so much more than just another great city. Zion was intended by God to be a special city, to which all the other nations could look to find God, and to learn about His unique righteousness and justice. But during Micah's day, Zion was filled with bloodshed, and with leaders whose greedy and cruel behaviors were

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<sup>9</sup> *NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, p. 1504 footnote on Micah 3:7.

<sup>10</sup> 2 Peter 1:21 says it this way, "For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit." This filling from God's Spirit was accompanied by being filled with justice and might. God alone gave Micah the strength to declare what was just and right and true. Despite how unpopular it may have made him with many people, he declared the sin among his own people. Micah faced a challenging ministry calling, but with God on his side, he was more than equal to the challenge.

<sup>11</sup> Sandwiched between the lack of justice in verses 1 and 9, is the presence of justice in Micah's life and ministry in verse 8.

<sup>12</sup> Let's be clear here, Micah still needed to make a living, and feed and clothe himself, but he wasn't driven by greed like the false prophets. What motivated him was the power of God's Spirit to declare God's message whether it was popular or not. His greatest concern was whether he was saying what God wanted him to say, nothing more and nothing less.

tearing the flesh off their own people.<sup>13</sup> <sup>14</sup> New Testament commentator James Boice explains it this way: “What troubled Micah (and God far more) was the sin in the courts, palaces, and temple. All three branches of government were corrupt. Worse yet they worked hand in hand. The politicians got their way in the courts, and the judges were paid for their destruction of justice. The prophets also benefited from this arrangement and supported the government in turn.”<sup>15</sup>

All of these powerful people were in cahoots!<sup>16</sup> Even so, in spite of all of their obvious injustice... Micah 3:11 tells us, “...Yet they look for the LORD’s support and say, “Is not the LORD among us? No disaster will come upon us.” In other words, since they were living in Zion, God’s special dwelling place, they thought they could do pretty much whatever they wanted to, and STILL expect God’s blessing.<sup>17</sup> They were so out of step with God’s Spirit, so spiritually lost in the dark, that they didn’t even realize that God was no longer with them.<sup>18</sup>

Micah 3:12 declares, “Therefore because of you, Zion will be plowed like a field, Jerusalem will become a heap of rubble, the temple hill a mound overgrown with thickets.” Verse 12 summarizes the clear cause and effect: The sin of all of these various corrupt leaders will cause God’s judgment to come on the city of Jerusalem. Notice how verse 12 simply refers to “the temple *hill*,” not “the temple *of the Lord*.” Micah may very well be implying here, that “The Lord has left the temple and handed it over to destruction.”<sup>19</sup>

Now history records that Jerusalem didn’t end up being destroyed until some 100 years later, which indicates two things:

1. First of all, At least some of the city’s leaders actually heeded Micah’s warning, and they turned back to the Lord just in time, following the spiritual reforms of good King Hezekiah.

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<sup>13</sup> Zion is a “poetic parallel to Jerusalem.” “...The title invests the capital with a theological quality: it was regarded as the center of the nations in the biblical world and the place where God uniquely dwelled.” See Ezekiel 5:5-8. *NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, Grand Rapids, MI, 2015, p. 1809 footnote on Micah 3:10.

<sup>14</sup> Habakkuk 2:12 called out the wicked Babylonians for the same kind of wicked behavior found in Jerusalem, “Woe to him who builds a city with bloodshed and establishes a town by injustice!”

<sup>15</sup> Cited by Kenneth L. Barker, *The New American Commentary: Micah*, Broadman, Nashville, TN, 1999, pp. 80-81.

<sup>16</sup> “Leaders (rulers and judges, v. 1), prophets (v. 5), and leaders plus priests (vv. 9,11). The addressed leaders, prophets and priests represent...the branches of Israel’s government. ...Instead of working together to foster justice, the constituted leaders are all in cahoots to plunder the helpless.” *NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, Grand Rapids, MI, 2015, p. 1808 footnote on Micah 3:1-12.

<sup>17</sup> After all, they had the Ark of the Covenant within the walls of their city, so what bad thing could possibly happen to them?

<sup>18</sup> Last Sunday, back in Micah 1:2, the prophet declared how God is reigning from His temple in heaven, and how He is bearing witness against His people’s sin, and sending disaster upon them. The very God whom they assumed would never allow any disaster to come upon them, was the very God who was sending disaster

<sup>19</sup> *NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, Grand Rapids, MI, 2015, p. 1809 footnote on Micah 3:12.

2. Secondly, Micah's prediction of Jerusalem's destruction was ultimately fulfilled some 100 years later, when the dreaded Babylonians completely destroyed Jerusalem, and took God's people into captivity.

In fact, right around 100 years later, the prophet Jeremiah quotes Micah 3:12. Jeremiah 26:18 says, "Micah of Moresheth prophesied [about a hundred years ago] in the days of Hezekiah king of Judah. He told all the people of Judah, 'This is what the LORD Almighty says: " 'Zion will be plowed like a field, Jerusalem will become a heap of rubble, the temple hill a mound overgrown with thickets.'" In other words, a century later God's people had again become corrupt, so Jeremiah reminds them of Micah's prophecy, which was fulfilled during Jeremiah's lifetime. But not before they were given fair warning, and given a similar opportunity to turn back to the Lord...

In the very next verse, Jeremiah 26:19 declares, "...Did not Hezekiah fear the LORD and seek his favor? And did not the LORD relent, so that he did not bring the disaster he pronounced against them? ...."<sup>20</sup> In other words, it seems that Micah's preaching was instrumental in prompting King Hezekiah to make religious reforms during his reign. Those reforms had at least two incredibly powerful results:

First of all, 1) The mighty miracle of Jerusalem being spared when the angel of the LORD intervened and put 185,000 Assyrians troops to death, right outside the gates of Jerusalem.<sup>21</sup>

Second of all, 2) Many of God's people returned to a right relationship with Him, including many of these corrupt leaders. Along with King Hezekiah, a rare but godly leader in his time, they chose to fear the LORD, which resulted in regaining God's blessings for another 100 years.

You see, not all the leaders of Israel were corrupted by sin, and not all of them practiced injustice. Micah and King Hezekiah represent at least two godly leaders who didn't despise justice and distort what was right. Instead, they chose to hate what God hates; they chose to hate injustice by speaking out, and acting out, against it.

God not only hated injustice back then,

**God still hates injustice...**

**3) In our world today.**

Micah 6:8 says, "He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God." I appreciate how Pastor Joe Thorn explains this

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<sup>20</sup> Jeremiah 18:7-8 says, "If at any time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be uprooted, torn down and destroyed, and if that nation I warned repents of its evil, then I will relent and not inflict on it the disaster I had planned."

<sup>21</sup> See 2 Kings 19:32-35.

verse: “[God] calls us to DO justice, not just TALK about it. ...It’s a calling to protect the innocent and speak up for those whose voices are not heard. It’s one thing to be FOR justice, but to DO it is something else. God wants us to be active in the lives of our neighbors as we seek to love them. But the Lord also calls us to LOVE kindness and mercy, NOT just do it. ...We must never think that our affections do not matter to our obedience. [Doing God’s will] without delight ultimately dishonors God....”<sup>22</sup>

### ***So what do we do about the injustice in our world today?***

Well, first of all, we need to...

#### **1) Wholeheartedly hate any injustice and wrongdoing in our world.**

We need to hate injustice without any equivocation or justification, or any qualified excuses; we need to openly profess that we HATE what God hates.<sup>23</sup>

Second of all, we need to...

#### **2) Repent sincerely if we’re behaving in unjust and wrong ways.**

We need to be authentic, and unhypocritical about our own guilt and sin. If we’re culpable in any way, then we need to take personal responsibility to make those things right before God.<sup>24</sup> A while back I watched a movie titled, “Sound of Freedom.” For me, the most powerful scene in the whole movie was when a repentant character named “Vampiro” shared his testimony; God had deeply convicted him of his sin, of sleeping with young prostitutes. Vampiro says, “All of a sudden I’m hit by this tidal wave, this tsunami of darkness and I know, I’m the sadness in her eyes. Me. I’m the darkness.”<sup>25 26</sup>

Friend, if any of us are the ones behaving in unjust and wrong ways, then we must repent. If we truly desire to make the injustices in our world better, then it must begin with us unreservedly bringing our darkness into God’s light.<sup>27</sup> And if we know of people who are committing injustices, then we need to either confront them personally, or we need to seek justice from law enforcement and other resources.

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<sup>22</sup> “...May God enable us to enjoy and find abiding pleasure in the display of kindness to others, much as he rejoiced in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.” Pastor Joe Thorn, “What Does the Lord Require of You?” article in *Daily Strength*, Crossway, Wheaton, IL, 2022, pp. 253-254.

<sup>23</sup> Consider Jesus’ words in Mark 7:9-13.

<sup>24</sup> Isaiah 1:16-17 says, “Wash and make yourselves clean. Take your evil deeds out of my sight; stop doing wrong. Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the fatherless; plead the case of the widow.”

<sup>25</sup> Learn more by reading here: <https://joelhirst.blog/2023/07/22/sound-of-freedom-a-review/> Watch the sobering video clip here:

[https://www.google.com/search?q=Sound+of+Freedom+movie+quote+I+saw+that+I+was+the+darkness&sca\\_esv=](https://www.google.com/search?q=Sound+of+Freedom+movie+quote+I+saw+that+I+was+the+darkness&sca_esv=)

<sup>26</sup> Another powerful quote from this movie is: “God’s children are not for sale.” Amen. No human being, an innocent child in particular, should ever be for sale. By some estimates, as many as 50 million people live in slavery in our world today.

<https://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2022/09/13/1122714064/modern-slavery-global-estimate-increase>

<sup>27</sup> See 1 John 1:5-10.

A 3<sup>rd</sup> thing that we need to do about injustice, is...

### **3) Grieve deeply and pray about the unjust and wrong things that are happening.**

We need to weep and lament over sin's impact on our society. In fact, let's be outraged! Let's hate what God hates! Let's be upset when we hear about Missing and Murdered Indigenous People.<sup>28</sup> This is a crisis of injustice, and it's happening even now, right in our own back yard. Let's get angry when we hear about people who are being exploited by sex trafficking. We're reminded to pray about this injustice every time we see one of these signs in a public restroom:



***You know what these signs mean right?***

They mean that sex trafficking is happening all across the United States, including right here in our own town of Bemidji.

A final thing that we need to do is...

### **4) Search for gospel ways to address injustice.**

- > Read books like “The Good News About Injustice” by Gary A. Haugen.
- > Get connected with groups like “The International Justice Mission.”
- > Visit places like “The Legacy Sites” in Montgomery Alabama.<sup>29</sup>
- > Be motivated by movies like “Just Mercy” and “Sound of Freedom.”
- > Partner with local groups like Support Within Reach and learn how we can serve.<sup>30</sup>
- > And more...

As modern-day followers of Jesus, we are filled with the same power and Holy Spirit that Micah was in Micah 3:8. So we need to...

- Speak up, and act out, when we see injustice and wrongdoing.
- Call out corrupt landlords, or unjust housing practices.
- Advocate for those who are being taken advantage of.
- Befriend those who've been wronged or treated unjustly.

**If we are truly devoted to God's love and goodness, then we must learn to hate what God hates.**

Friend, we can't be passive about injustice. The gospel calls us to action, to be people of truth and light. If being deeply devoted followers of Jesus doesn't compel us to care about injustice and wrongdoing, then what does it compel us to care about?

<sup>28</sup> <https://www.bia.gov/service/mmu/missing-and-murdered-indigenous-people-crisis>

<sup>29</sup> <https://legacysites.eji.org/>

<sup>30</sup> <https://www.supportwithinreach.org/>