

# The prophecy of Micah

## 5. Is it not for you to know judgement?

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*The [previous article](#) considered the teaching of Micah concerning the restoration of Israel in the Kingdom of God. The last two verses of Micah 2 speak of the time when the remnant of Israel will be regathered as a flock in the midst of the fold, and Messiah the King will go before them. With an abruptness that is characteristic of Micah's prophecy, the mood changes in chapter 3, and the prophet once more returns to the subject of impending judgement upon the nation for their sin.*

**I**N THE DAYS of Micah the leaders of the nation were guilty of despising that which was good and loving the evil: "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? who hate the good, and love the evil; who pluck off their skin from off them, and their flesh from off their bones; 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" (Mic. 3:1-3).

What Micah had to say in this chapter was largely for the spiritual leaders of the nation, the "heads of Jacob" and the "princes of the house of Israel". They were failing in their duty of leadership, and they were guilty of the utmost cruelty and oppression. Micah describes the way they treated their fellow men in terms of the preparation of an animal for food, in which every conceivable part of the animal carcass—even the bones—was used. The people were being robbed and spoiled until there was nothing left. Theirs was the spirit captured by the psalmist: "Have all the workers of iniquity no knowledge? *who eat up My people as they eat bread*, and call not upon the LORD" (14:4).

Such was their iniquity that judgement was inevitable, and in that day, when the workers of iniquity called upon God for deliverance, it would be to no avail: "Then shall they cry unto the LORD, but He will not hear them: He will even hide His face from them at that time, as they have behaved

themselves ill in their doings" (Mic. 3:4). So great was their sin that God would not hear them when they cried unto Him: "And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide Mine eyes from you: yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood" (Isa. 1:15).

### **Thus saith the LORD concerning the prophets**

Having addressed the princes of Israel, Micah now turned to those who claimed to be prophets of the Lord: "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. 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" (Mic. 3:5,6).

That the prophets Micah was addressing were false prophets is evident from their description. They "bite with their teeth", and Micah uses a word that is usually used in the Scriptures of the sting of serpents (see, for example, Eccl. 10:8,11; Jer. 8:17). The day would come when they would no longer "divine"—a word that is almost always used in a bad sense, indicative of witchcraft. Indeed, the presence of such in the land was a testimony to the failure of the nation to heed the warning of Moses: "There shall not be found among you any one that maketh his son or his daughter to pass through the fire, or that useth divination, or an observer of times, or an enchanter, or a witch" (Deut. 18:10).

Because of their failure to obey this commandment of Moses, God would intervene: "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" (Mic. 3:6). God is not saying

that the age of prophecy would cease, that the prophets in question would no longer have a message from God to convey, because Micah is speaking of false prophets who never did speak for God. They spoke nothing but lies. Rather, this is the language of judgement, as can be seen by comparison with a similar pronouncement from Amos, one of Micah's contemporaries: "Shall not the land tremble for this, and every one mourn that dwelleth therein? and it shall rise up wholly as a flood; and it shall be cast out and drowned, as by the flood of Egypt. And it shall come to pass in that day, saith the Lord GOD, that I will cause the sun to go down at noon, and I will darken the earth in the clear day: and I will turn your feasts into mourning, and all your songs into lamentation" (8:8-10).

Amos speaks of the impending judgements of God as a time of approaching darkness. The judgements that were to be meted out at the hands of the Assyrians would be so severe that it would be as if darkness had covered the land. Thus, concerning the coming of this day of the Lord, Joel said that "the day of the LORD cometh, for it is nigh at hand; a day of darkness and of gloominess, a day of clouds and of thick darkness, as the morning spread upon the mountains: a great people and a strong; there hath not been ever the like, neither shall be any more after it, even to the years of many generations" (2:1,2).

This was the only way to rid the false prophets out of the land: "Then shall the seers be ashamed, and the diviners confounded: yea, they shall all cover their lips; for there is no answer of God" (Mic. 3:7). To cover one's upper lip was a sign of great mourning; Ezekiel, for example, was commanded not to cover his upper lip when his wife died (Ezek. 24:17,22). Similarly, the lepers under the Law, who were expelled from the encampment of Israel, had to cover their upper lip, and go

about pronouncing their uncleanness (Lev. 13:45). Perhaps this was an indication that, as with the lepers, the false prophets were not fit to remain within the encampment of Israel.

**I am full of power by the spirit of the LORD**

In stark contrast to the false prophets, Micah continues, with reference to himself: "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" (3:8). Micah spoke the Word of God in truth, for he had been motivated by "the spirit of the LORD". He was one of those "holy men of God" who the Apostle Peter confirmed "spake as they were moved by the Holy [Spirit]" (2 Pet. 1:21).

There is, however, a Messianic flavour to this verse. Doubtless Micah spoke by the Holy Spirit, but there was only ever one man who could truly say, "I am full of power by the spirit of the LORD", and that was the Lord Jesus Christ, concerning whom John said, "he whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God: for God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto him" (Jno. 3:34). He had the Spirit without measure, as evidenced by the many mighty works that he was able to perform. That this would be so was predicted by Isaiah, when he spoke concerning the advent of the Branch who would grow out of Jesse's roots: "and the spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD" (Isa. 11:2).

The Spirit descended upon the Lord "in a bodily shape like a dove" (Lk. 3:22) when Jesus was baptized; and shortly afterwards, when Jesus preached in the synagogue at Nazareth on the sabbath day, he confirmed that he was full of power by the spirit of the Lord, by quoting the words of Isaiah: "And there was delivered unto

Micah	Jesus Christ
His name: 'Who is like Yah'	"Emmanuel . . . God with us" (Mt. 1:23) "God . . . manifest in the flesh" (1 Tim. 3:16) "I have manifested Thy name" (Jno. 17:6) "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father" (14:9)
"Full of power by the spirit of the LORD" (Mic. 3:8)	"God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto him" (Jno. 3:34) "And the spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him" (Isa. 11:2) "And the Holy [Spirit] descended in a bodily shape like a dove upon him" (Lk. 3:22)

The generation of Micah	The generation of Christ
Sheep without a shepherd	Sheep without a shepherd
The heads of Jacob “eat the flesh of My people” (Mic. 3:3)	The scribes and Pharisees “full of extortion and excess” (Mt. 23:25)
The prophets “bite with their teeth” (v. 5)	The scribes and Pharisees were a “generation of vipers” (v. 33)
“They build up Zion with blood” (v. 10)	The scribes and Pharisees were “the children of them which killed the prophets” (v. 31)
“Is not the LORD among us?” (v. 11)	Herod’s temple considered “this holy place” (Acts 6:13)
Judgement to come at the hands of Assyria (1:3,4; 2:3)	Judgement to come at the hands of Rome (Lk. 21:23; Mt. 23:37-39)

him the book of the prophet Esaias. And when he had opened the book, he found the place where it was written, The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; He hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord . . . And he began to say unto them, This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears” (Lk. 4:17-21).

We saw in the last article that the spiritual state of the nation to which Jesus came bore striking resemblances to Israel in the time of Micah. Because of failures in leadership, both generations had been left like sheep without a shepherd. The “heads of Jacob” in Jesus’ days were equally corrupt, and they were similarly guilty of oppression, as Jesus made clear when delivering his great condemnation of the lawyers: “And he said, Woe unto you also, ye lawyers! for ye lade men with burdens grievous to be borne, and ye yourselves touch not the burdens with one of your fingers” (Lk. 11:46). Just as Micah accused the prophets of biting like serpents with their teeth, so Jesus addressed the scribes and Pharisees as “serpents”, and a “generation of vipers” (Mt. 23:33).

Micah’s message to the ungodly in his days was one of judgement to come. Likewise Jesus came to declare unto Jacob his transgression and to Israel his sin, and to warn of judgement to come upon the men of his generation—a judgment that was ultimately fulfilled by the Roman armies in A.D. 70. This remarkable parallel between the nation of Israel in the days of Micah and the evil generation to whom Jesus came helps us to understand the closing verses of Micah 3.

### **They build up Zion with blood**

For the second time in this chapter, Micah demands that the princes of the house of Israel heed his words: “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. They build up Zion with blood, and Jerusalem with iniquity” (vv. 9,10). Their wickedness extended even to the shedding of blood for the furtherance of their own intentions, and this was certainly equally true in the days of Jesus.

Indeed, Jesus prophesied of their willingness to shed blood: “Wherefore, behold, I send unto you prophets, and wise men, and scribes: and some of them ye shall kill and crucify; and some of them shall ye scourge in your synagogues, and persecute them from city to city: that upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias son of Barachias, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar” (Mt. 23:34,35). The cup of their iniquity was filled to the full when they crucified the Lord of glory, and declared, “His blood be on us, and on our children” (27:25).

### **Is not the LORD among us?**

It is remarkable that, for all their sins, they still had the misguided opinion that God was with them, and still dwelt among them. The deceitfulness of sin had blinded both generations to their true standing with God: “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” (Mic. 3:11).



**Relief from the Arch of Titus commemorating the fall of Jerusalem.**

Picture: Gunnar Bach Pedersen/  
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This was the very issue that prompted the Sanhedrin to bring Stephen to trial before them in Acts 6 and 7. Judging by their accusation levelled against Stephen, it is clear that Stephen had been preaching of judgement to come, and in particular the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem:

“And they stirred up the people, and the elders, and the scribes, and came upon him, and caught him, and brought him to the council, and set up false witnesses, which said, This man ceaseth not to speak blasphemous words against *this holy place*, and the law: for we have heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth shall *destroy this place*, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered us” (Acts 6:12-14).

The belief of the Jews was that the temple in Jerusalem was the very dwelling place of God, and therefore it could never be destroyed—a belief that Stephen dispelled by reference to the words of Isaiah: “Howbeit the most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands; as saith the prophet, Heaven is My throne, and earth is My footstool: what house will ye build Me? saith the Lord: or what is the place of My rest? Hath not My hand made all these things?” (7:48-50).

### **Jerusalem shall become heaps**

As a further testimony to their wickedness and their willingness to shed blood, Stephen himself was put to death. But his words did not fail. Less than forty years later the Roman armies devastated the Land of Israel, and the temple in which the Jews placed such trust was razed

to the ground. Micah also prophesied of this great destruction in the final verse of chapter 3: “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” (v. 12).

Doubtless in the first instance these warning words of Micah were levelled against the men of his own generation. But that this overthrow of Jerusalem was not fulfilled in Micah’s days is evident from the words of the elders of Israel to whom Jeremiah the prophet spoke some years after the time of Micah:

“Then rose up certain of the elders of the land, and spake to all the assembly of the people, saying, 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. Did Hezekiah king of Judah and all Judah put him at all to death? did he not fear the LORD, and besought the LORD, and the LORD repented Him of the evil which He had pronounced against them? Thus might we procure great evil against our souls” (Jer. 26:17-19).

Clearly there was a repentance of sorts in the days of Hezekiah, and as a result of this national repentance the city of Jerusalem was spared, and Sennacherib the king of Assyria was not permitted to take it.

Instead, Micah 3:12 began to see its fulfilment at the hands of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon. Jerusalem's overthrow was continued by Antiochus in the period between the Testaments. But the prophecy was not fully exhausted until the Romans desolated the city in A.D. 70 and beyond. During the reign of the Emperor Hadrian a plough was driven across the temple mount in order to symbolise the foundation of a new Roman city, given the name of Aelia Capitolina. A temple devoted to the worship of Ashtoreth was erected on the site of the temple, and Jews were prohibited from entering the city of Jerusalem.

Thus the mountain of the house became as the high places of the forest, even as Jesus himself had foretold that it would:

"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I



Picture: Lawrence Cave

have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! *Behold, your house is left unto you desolate.* For I say unto you, Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord" (Mt. 23:37-39). Nevertheless in these words of the Lord there was also hope. Whilst terrible times were approaching for the city of Jerusalem, the day would ultimately come when its inhabitants would say, "Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord". That day has not yet arrived, but it assuredly will, and Micah continues to speak of that great day in chapter 4.

[\(To be continued\)](#)

**Sennacherib's prism recording his military exploits. There is no mention of the fall of Jerusalem at that time.**