

The Disaster of Unjust Leaders Micah 3:1-12

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If you want to start a feeding frenzy on social media, just post something about the topic of justice, step back, and watch the internet boil. Our text today reminds us that justice was a hot topic long before Twitter. Justice is a major concern to the prophet Micah. In chapter three, his particular focus is the injustice of the leaders of Judah.

Micah confronts the leaders of Judah, including judges, prophets, and priests. Acting like a prosecutor on behalf of Yahweh, he brings charges, presents evidence, and then reads the sentence from the Lord. In our passage today, we will notice **three indictments against unjust leaders**.

Justice in Biblical Context

Before we look at these three indictments, it will help us to quickly review the idea of justice in its biblical context. There are a few key passages I want you to note. You may want to write these down for more study.

Exodus 23:1-9

"You shall not spread a false report. You shall not join hands with a wicked man to be a malicious witness. ² You shall not fall in with the many to do evil, nor shall you bear witness in a lawsuit, siding with the many, so as to pervert justice, ³ nor shall you be partial to a poor man in his lawsuit.

⁴ "If you meet your enemy's ox or his donkey going astray, you shall bring it back to him. ⁵ If you see the donkey of one who hates you lying down under its burden, you shall refrain from leaving him with it; you shall rescue it with him.

⁶ "You shall not pervert the justice due to your poor in his lawsuit. ⁷ Keep far from a false charge, and do not kill the innocent and righteous, for I will not acquit the wicked. ⁸ And you shall take no bribe, for a bribe blinds the clear-sighted and subverts the cause of those who are in the right.

⁹ "You shall not oppress a sojourner. You know the heart of a sojourner, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt.

Deuteronomy 16:18-20

¹⁸ "You shall appoint judges and officers in all your towns that the LORD your God is giving you, according to your tribes, and they shall judge the people with righteous judgment. ¹⁹ You shall not pervert justice. You shall not show partiality, and you shall not accept a bribe, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and subverts the cause of the

righteous. ²⁰ Justice, and only justice, you shall follow, that you may live and inherit the land that the LORD your God is giving you.

Deuteronomy 27:19, 25

¹⁹ "Cursed be anyone who perverts the justice due to the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen.'

²⁵ "Cursed be anyone who takes a bribe to shed innocent blood.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen.'

Jeremiah 22:3

³ Thus says the LORD: Do justice and righteousness, and deliver from the hand of the oppressor him who has been robbed. And do no wrong or violence to the resident alien, the fatherless, and the widow, nor shed innocent blood in this place.

These verses give us a sense of what Micah meant when he spoke about justice and injustice to the leaders of Judah.

- Justice means giving people their due as those who bear God's image.
- Justice means impartially rendering judgment, righting wrongs, and proper authorities meting out punishment with fairness.
- The leaders were responsible to pursue justice and not pervert it.
- In the truest sense, all justice is "social justice" because it has to do with relationships between people. That terminology has been injected with different content and meaning in current discussions. But justice has to do with how people treat other people.

So, with this in mind as God's framework for justice, let's dig into the three indictments against unjust leaders.

I. Unjust leaders savagely prey on those whom they should protect (vv. 1-4).

A. Audience – Heads/rulers are the leaders who were appointed as judges (Deut. 16).

B. Charge – you should know justice but you hate good and love evil.

C. Evidence – you prey on those you are charged to protect.

1. Note the savage imagery – tear, eat, flay, break, chop.

2. Rather than protecting the people, they preyed upon them through oppression and injustice. Verses 10-11 give us insight into how they did this. They did it through bloodshed and bribery.

3. They were like the worthless shepherds of Ezek. 34:2-11. They feasted on the sheep they were supposed to be tending and protecting.

D. Sentence – when they cry to the Lord, he will refuse to help them.

A Wall Street Journal article called "The Power Trap" described the change that often occurs as people climb to the top of the ladder. The author said people begin acting like a "beast." He quotes a business professor who said, "'It's an incredibly consistent effect. When you give

people power, they basically start acting like fools. They flirt inappropriately, tease in a hostile fashion, and become totally impulsive." The author cited a study which asked members of a high-power group about speeding. They said it was OK for them to speed because they were important but other people should observe the posted limit.

These observations go along with the insight of Lord Acton who said, "Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely."

The apostle Paul warned the Ephesian elders that after his departure, "savage wolves would arise among you, not sparing the flock."

The corrupting influence of power often leads to injustice. Unjust leaders savagely prey on those they should protect.

II. Unjust leaders selfishly prostitute the prophetic office (vv. 5-8).

A. Audience – prophets.

B. Charge – they lead people astray.

C. Evidence – they prostitute their prophetic message for payment. To those who pay them, they give pleasant messages of peace. To those who don't pay them, they give condemning messages of war. You get the heaven sermon or hell sermon based on your offering.

Something has gone terribly wrong when ministers handle the Word of God as if it were a slogan in a marketing campaign. The Apostle Paul warned of the proliferation of teachers who were more than willing to tell people what they wanted to hear instead of proclaiming God's Word with clarity and faithfulness. Those who stand in the position of proclaiming God's Word would do well to follow the example of the Apostle.

2 Cor. 2:17 – For we are not, like so many, peddlers of God's word, but as men of sincerity, as commissioned by God, in the sight of God, we speak in Christ.

2 Cor. 4:2 – But we have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God.

The ministry of the word is prostituted when preachers refuse to speak with certainty where God has spoken with clarity. But it can also happen when preachers elevate minor things to the level of major things and assign essential status to non-essential doctrines. By doing so, they can make Trojan horses out of their hobby horses and promote disunity among God's people.

D. Sentence – their prophetic gifts will be removed, God will not speak to them, they will be shamed and disgraced. God will not use them to speak for him any longer.

Notice the contrast with Micah in v. 8. He is filled with power, the Spirit of the Lord, with justice and might, to declare the sins of the people. His message is not for sale. He is all about speaking the truth as God reveals it. He is not owned by the audience. He serves the Lord.

Unjust leaders selfishly prostitute the prophetic message.

III. Unjust leaders shamelessly presume the presence of God (vv. 9-12).

- A. Audience – all the leaders, judges, priests, and prophets.
- B. Charge – they detest justice and pervert it by making the straight crooked.
- C. Evidence – judges take bribes, priests teach for money, prophets practice divination for money. All of them are motivated by greed and pervert justice.

Bribery is big business. The World Bank estimates that \$1 trillion is used annually for bribes and corrupt exchanges in business and government. An article from the National Institute for Justice states, “Just one seemingly harmless bribe affects both the person making the bribe and the one accepting. ‘And notably, its domino like effect can impact many individuals over time, spreading quickly across a society and, if left unchecked, entrenching a culture of dishonesty. ... Over time the line between ethical and unethical behavior becomes blurry, and dishonesty becomes the ‘way of doing business.’”

This had become a way of doing business for the corrupt leaders of Judah including the judges, priests, and prophets.

In addition, they presumed on the presence of God.

1. They lean on the Lord saying, “Is not the Lord in the midst of us?” We have God’s presence. His temple is here in Jerusalem.
2. Nothing bad is going to happen to us. God is here.
3. This is shameless presumption. See Jeremiah 7:3-4 for this attitude. God’s temple will not protect you from God’s judgment due to your sinful ways.

I sat with a leader once who defended the immoral behavior of a pastor by appealing to the fact that he “led the association in baptisms everywhere he served” and that he was “anointed by God.” But I tell you that statistical success will not hide the sins of a leader for long. It is a shameless presumption on God’s presence in the life of a leader to cloak immoral behavior in the wrapping of statistical success.

- D. Sentence – Jerusalem will be overthrown and uninhabited. The temple mount will be deserted like a wooded height. Babylon would bring this about.

Unjust leaders shamelessly presume the presence of God.

Now, it would be easy for us to walk away from a text like this never feeling the impact of it in a personal way. Why? Because we are not judges, prophets, or priests. Most of us don’t have any kind of civic or religious authority. We are not governing leaders who have the welfare of other people in our hands.

But, aren’t there some principles here that apply to other forms of leadership? I think there are.

- Notice the relationship between leadership and justice. Leaders have some form of power due to their position and influence. When the power that comes from that position or that influence is used to take advantage of others, injustice is the result.

- You could be a CEO of the company or a shift supervisor at Taco Bell. In either case, you could use the power of your position to help yourself by hurting others. You could treat people unfairly because you don't like them or treat your friends with favoritism.
- You could be a teacher who gives better or worse grades to students not based on the quality of their work but on some personal likes or dislikes.
- You could be a Supreme Court justice or a parent trying to sort out a squabble between siblings. In either case, you could give preferential treatment or you could give harsher punishment based on personal advantage or favoritism rather than on fairness and truth.
- Christians must pursue justice in their relationships with others. We must seek to give each one what is due to them by God's standard, not our own.
- The issue of justice forces us to consider the connection between our relationship with God and our relationships with other people.
 - Justice is rooted in the character of God. This is why God expects justice from his people. They are to reflect his character.
 - To profess to know and love God and to treat others with injustice is blatantly inconsistent. This is the basis of Micah's indictment of Judah's leaders.
 - Doing justice is not a way of salvation. It is not the gospel. But it is a by-product of the gospel. To have a heart changed by the gospel is to have a heart that seeks to live in proper relationships with those around us – in other words, to live justly.
- To use spiritual authority as a cloak for injustice is especially heinous to God.
- Repentance is the answer for injustice. See Jeremiah 26:17-19 as a postscript to this chapter in Micah.

Conclusion

Do you know the biggest problem when it comes to issues of justice? Depravity. The biggest obstacle to justice is human sin. We are all guilty of injustice in some form. We have all failed to give others their due. We have all played favorites for our own advantage in our relationships. We are all sinners.

But there is good news for sinners who practice injustice. 1 Peter 3:18 says, "For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God." The good news is that the most just person that ever lived, Jesus Christ, the sinless Son of God, suffered the most unjust death imaginable for our salvation. He hung on the cross as if he were a sinner even though he was sinless. He was the just one dying for unjust ones like us. Why did he do it? To bring us to God.

Through faith in Jesus Christ, unjust sinners become righteous in God's sight. Our sins are forgiven. God sees us in Christ as having kept his law. Christ's righteous life is credited to us. We are welcomed into God's family as his children through Jesus Christ.

God also gives us His Spirit to live in us to shape us and change us and enable us to pursue justice in our relationships with others. We become new creations enabled to live in obedience to God by loving God and loving our neighbors as we should. Have you trusted in Jesus Christ? Why not trust in him right now.