

# AND JUSTICE FOR ALL

MICAH 3 & 4

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## **INTRODUCTION/REVIEW**

Why would we want to study the book of Micah? Why would we want to study any part of Scripture? [*let people respond*] We want to know the Author of the Scriptures better, and we want to grow up to be more like His Son. And, I don't know about you, but I am always amazed at how relevant the Scriptures are to my life's situation and how relevant they are to the world in which we live.

Last week, as we talked about what God was judging His people for: idolatry, abusive mistreatment of each other, and ignoring God's Word, I couldn't help but think how relevant those issues are for us today.

And I think it's important to ask ourselves some questions: [A. REVIEW QUESTIONS]

1. **Is Jesus Christ number 1 in my life?** Is He at the center of my life? Am I walking with Him, and allowing Him to take the lead?
2. **Am I allowing the Word of God, the Scriptures, to speak into my life?** Am I setting aside time to be in the Word, and am I spending time listening for the voice of God in the Scriptures and in prayer?
3. **Am I loving others with the love with which I am loved?** Or are people just a nuisance, or worse yet, am I viewing them as less than? We talked about ruthless people thinking of other people, especially children, as mere numbers. I talked about the scourge of human trafficking and how it must be stopped. In our own minds, we must zealously guard against seeing others - and even each other in the church - as a number or especially, as a label. I'm going to go out on a limb here and share my opinion: I am seeing a resurgence of labeling people. It needs to stop, and it needs to stop first among the people of God.

**Viewing labels instead of people makes it easy for us to quit loving.** When we view each other by our politics, we reduce people to a label. We are starting to talk about people in terms of their vaccination status. When we do that, we reduce people to a label. When we view each other through the lens of race, we reduce people to a label. Every person is unique, uniquely made by God, who planted eternity into every human heart. When we view labels instead of people, we ignore the hand and heart of God.

One day God will gather all those who have been oppressed by the labelmakers and the ruthless. He will gather them together in a place of safety, a place that will finally feel like home.

We know that the place of safety for the sheep of God's pasture is in the shape of a cross, where Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd, gave up His life for the sheep, even the sheep who weren't in the pen yet. He came to cancel sin, and break the yoke of oppression.

If you are in pain today... if you are in a place of oppression today... don't look to money to deliver you! Don't look to the government to set you free! Don't trust in human words no matter how affirming and positive they may seem... Trust in the One who said, **YOU SHALL KNOW THE TRUTH AND THE TRUTH SHALL SET YOU FREE!**

That was just review! I can't wait to dive in and see what chapters 3 and 4 have to tell us, because I think we will find something particularly helpful for us today because we are going to explore the topic of justice in a sermon called, "And Justice For All."

### **AN IMPORTANT WORD IN MICAH**

The opening word of chapter 3 is "HEAR!" This word in Hebrew is called ***shama***. "HEAR O ISRAEL, THE LORD OUR GOD, THE LORD IS ONE." The writings of the prophet Micah are organized into three main sections, beginning with this word ***shama***.

In chapters 1-2, the people of God are warned of judgment because of idolatry, abuse, and ignoring the Scriptures.

Today, in chapters 3-4, we will discover the result of oppressive leadership versus the result of just leadership.

Two weeks from today we will encounter the final shema for chapters 6-7, and we will ask the question: what does God want from us, anyway?

If you're keeping score at home, you realize I skipped next week. There's no shema that begins chapter 5, but it's incredibly meaningful nonetheless, and I can't wait to share it with you next week.

### **GOD QUESTIONS THE LEADERS OF ISRAEL (3:1-4)**

In chapter 3, God is questioning leaders: political, spiritual, and business. He asks them, "*Is it not for you to know justice?*" In some translations it says, "Is it not for you to embrace justice?" I like that better, because God's people - especially leaders - are truly called to embrace justice. Justice should be part of who we are.

This leads to the question: **What is justice?** If one passage of Scripture doesn't answer your questions, you should find other passages where the same words are used. The writings of the Old Testament prophets are replete with uses of the word justice.

The other prophet, Amos, blasts the leaders of Israel for *injustice* just like Micah did, and he says this in chapter 5 verses 10-12. This is *The Message Bible*:

'Raw truth is never popular. But here it is, bluntly spoken: Because you run roughshod over the poor and take the bread right out of their mouths, you're never going to move into the luxury homes you have built. You're never going to drink wine from the expensive vineyards you've planted.

'I know precisely the extent of your violations, the enormity of your sins. Appalling! You bully right-living people, taking bribes right and left and kicking the poor when they're down.

'Justice is a lost cause. Evil is epidemic. Decent people throw up their hands. Protest and rebuke are useless, a waste of breath. Seek good and not evil— and live! You talk about God , the God-of-the-Angel-Armies, being your best friend. Well, live like it, and maybe it will happen.'

In his blog on The Gospel Coalition website, Kevin DeYoung writes:

The fifth chapter of Amos contains some of the most striking and famous justice language in the Bible. The Lord rebukes His people [and especially the leaders] ... for hating the one who speaks the truth, for trampling on the poor, for turning aside the needy in the gate. Because of their sin, the Lord despises Israel's feasts and assemblies and threatens to visit the land with darkness and not light. The only hope for God's people is that they "seek good, and not evil," that they establish justice in the gate. Or, to quote the concluding exhortation made famous by Martin Luther King Jr., Israel must "let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream."

So, as we begin to formulate some thoughts about what justice is, let's look first at the easy part - what justice is *not*.

Justice is Not:

**1. Kicking the poor when they are down instead of giving them a hand up.** It seems the wealthy were selling the poor into slavery even when the poor owed as little as a pair of sandals (Amos 2:6-7). In Micah, we see single Moms with children being pressured to give up their homes which were given to them as an inheritance. In both cases, the poor were being oppressed, not assisted.

**2. A Pay to Play System.** No money, no justice. No money, no ministry. You were shut out of the courthouse, the prophet's house, and the house of worship.

Political and business leaders were doing “justice” for the highest bidder. In ancient Israel the leading men of the town would gather at the city gate to decide the cases that came to them. Instead of making fair judgment based on the truth, the men of Amos’ day accepted bribes and paid no attention to the righteous plea of the poor (Amos 5:10, 12). Spiritual leaders also required payment before any intercession or sacrifice was made on behalf of the individual.

3. **Arbitrary, excessive taxation on the poor to benefit the rich** (Amos 5:11). Kevin DeYoung sums up his thoughts by saying that Amos 5, “reaffirms what we see throughout Scriptures. God hates injustice, and Scripture defines it as a corrupted judicial system, an arbitrary legal code, and cruelty to the poor.”<sup>1</sup>

4. **The wealthy are living dishonestly at the expense of the poor.** The powerful cheated and perverted justice, and, as written in Micah 2:8-10, made their money by outrageous seizure and land grabbing.

5. **Justice is not revenge.** One historic phrase about justice is the famous, “Eye for an eye.” This appears several times in the Law of Moses, and is present in other ancient systems as well, such as Babylon and Rome. This deals with an intentional crime. If someone intentionally gouges out one of your eyes, they should have their eye gouged out as well.

But again we ask, what IS Justice? Here are some positive components of Justice. Again, I don’t have all the answers, and you may find my list of three woefully lacking.

### 1. **Justice includes community.**

- a. We tend to have an idea of vigilante justice when we think of “eye for an eye”, and that is part of it, but it is important for us to keep in mind that this is enshrined amidst other laws that were designed to keep the community of God’s people intact.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevin-deyoung/seven-passages-on-social-justice-5/>

- b. The law was written in such a way as to strongly discourage walking up to someone and gouging out an eye. That would tear the fabric of the community apart.

2. **Justice brings correction and restoration.** The Hebrew word, *mishpat*, brings legal proceedings to mind. The judge or jury hearing a case must arrive at a correct verdict, showing no partiality to anyone.

- a. First there is - if possible - correction through the restoration of loss to the victims of the crime. The victim is justice's first priority, but not its only priority.
- b. Secondly, justice can offer correction and restoration to the perpetrator of the crime. Correction needs to be harsh enough to be a deterrent to the crime (by the way that's a great parenting tip too, haha), but not too harsh - not like Jean Valjean's 19 year prison sentence for stealing a loaf of bread. Ideally, if the perpetrator's heart is open to it, along with the correction can come an opportunity for restoration.

3. **Justice reflects the heart of God.**

- a. God is holy, good, and impartial. God is righteous, true, and incorruptible. God is compassionate and merciful.
- b. God was angry with the kings because He specifically called them to embrace justice. He zealously desired all Judah's [leaders] to stop taking bribes and defend the just cause of the helpless instead of exploiting them.<sup>2</sup>

Yet here in Micah 3 this is what we see. It was so bad that God compares it to cannibalism... His people were being heartlessly chopped up - to the point of removing skin from bone so that everything got either put in

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevin-deyoung/seven-passages-on-social-justice-1/>

the pot or the grinder. The prophets, who should have stood up to this, were also on the take and so were the priests, who represented God to the people.

Remember Jesus' words that were read earlier to us today: "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves."

#### RESULTS OF INJUSTICE:

1. **Signs of the presence of God removed.**
2. **Voice of God silent.**

To the prophets, the ones who are gifted to see into the future... the ones who are supposed to be proclaiming THUS SAITH THE LORD... To the priests who light the fire of sacrifice and teach the Law, the signs of the presence of God - light and revelation of God's Word - are being removed. Darkness will be in its place.

And those of you who could have risen voices to declare God's truth and justice for all, but didn't? Not only will the voice of God be silent, but you will begin to lose your voice among the people, and you won't be able to speak even when you want to.

[Bonus Material: I sat with a friend earlier this week who was struggling with an issue that maybe you can relate to: the Scriptures we have been reading as we've studied Micah indicate that God has it in for wicked evildoers who hate justice, and that He even hates them. What about hate the sin, and love the sinner?

Well, He actually does hate the wicked. But it is the wicked behavior of the wicked that puts them on God's enemies list, not some capricious hatred inside the heart of God. God's heart toward the wicked is the same as His heart toward us: He is here, and when we are tired of going our own way and finally give up and repent, He will be ready to pick us up and receive us once again. The wicked can repent, but they choose not to, and **that** is what makes them wicked.

Here, sadly, the leaders of God's people have turned toward unrighteousness and injustice, and God has taken away their vision and replaced it with darkness, and taken away their ability to hear His voice and proclaim His Word and replaced it with stunned silence. ]

Christian, where there once was light in your life, is there now darkness? Where you once heard God speak to you, is there now silence? These are signs from the heart of God: COME BACK TO ME! Come back to Me and find light again! Draw closer to Me so you can once again hear My voice above the noise pollution of your own soul.

## **GOD BRINGS A KINGDOM OF JUSTICE FOR ALL**

Chapter three paints a bleak picture of injustice for everyone, but chapter 4 begins to describe a Kingdom of Justice For All. It's the Kingdom we proclaim every Sunday when we sing, "World without end. Amen."

We KNOW that *this* world is going to pass away... read 2 Peter 3 for clarity on that. After this world passes away, God will bring forth a new heaven and new earth for eternity. That is the world that will have no end. And in this eternal Kingdom justice reigns. A justice that...

1. **Excludes no one**. In Micah 4 we find that in the Kingdom of Justice For All, all means *all*.

It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and it shall be lifted up above the hills; and peoples shall flow to it, **and many nations shall come**, and say: "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob ...

Although we see glimpses of this Kingdom in the church, this Kingdom will come when Jesus Christ returns.



Many nations, not just one... many languages, not just one... many ethnicities, not just one... all skin colors, not just one. And yet, Jesus Christ has reconciled us all into one, not only with one another, but He has reconciled us to God by His blood.

God's inclusivity extends past nationalities and skin color, to those with physical limitations and special needs, as well as those who feel they are outcasts and on the fringes of society:

In that day, declares the Lord , I will assemble the lame and gather those who have been driven away and those whom I have afflicted; and the lame I will make the remnant, and those who were cast off, a strong nation; and the Lord will reign over them in Mount Zion from this time forth and forevermore. ' (Micah 4:6-7)

Are you feeling defeated, deflated, devalued? God hasn't written you off! He cares for you personally, and can meet your needs regardless of your situation! What an awesome, mighty, and loving God we serve!

2. **Is rooted in worship (knowing and loving God).** The center of the Kingdom of Justice for all is God, and the worship of God. But it is worship on His terms. "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord , to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths." For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. (Micah 4:2)

Worship is all about God, not about us! HEAR O ISRAEL, The Lord our God, the Lord is One! And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul and strength.!" Worship begins and ends with loving God, and surrendering our will, including our agendas, to God.

**3. Will bring peace to enemies.** We have been trying to bring peace to the world for years. We can't even bring peace to our own nation anymore. Peace is part of the fruit of the Spirit....

Peace now comes through individual Christians joining together as a local church in an attitude of peace that's grounded in love. But one day, peace is going to go global as God directly reigns over the earth.

**4. Will allow all to enjoy what they have worked for.** Micah 4:4 talks about everyone living under the shade of their own fig tree and vine. This is its own picture of justice in community. It doesn't mean nobody's sharing; it means nobody is coveting and taking, including a foreign power or domestic government.

This actually is an ancient metaphor that was used throughout the Middle East at the time. If you were able to live under your own vine and fig tree, then you were able to live your life without interference. Vines and fig trees took more than one season to grow... in fact, it is years after their planting that one begins to enjoy the full fruit of either. So, there's also steadiness, security, and longevity, as well as prosperity here.

**5. Its promise brings hope.** Because of the seeds Israel's leaders had sown, their harvest looked bleak.

Foreign attacks were coming; several nations at once would stand up against them, until at last Babylon would take them away. This would happen 100 years after Micah, because generation after generation refused to follow God's justice and love Him wholeheartedly.

Jerusalem, would indeed be plowed under as predicted in Micah 3:12, and the Temple would become a place overgrown with brush. But the menacing nations now surrounding Judah and Samaria are oblivious to God's plan:

'But they do not know the thoughts of the Lord; they do not understand His plan, that He has gathered them as sheaves to the threshing floor. ' Micah 4:12

The opposition that you face today, child of God, is just the opportunity for you to be stronger. Fill yourself with hope that, even though you may feel powerless now, the all-powerful One has a plan that He is working out in spite of what it looks like and regardless of how it feels.

“No eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no mind has imagined what God has prepared for those who love him.” But it was to us that God revealed these things by his Spirit.

1 Corinthians 2:9-10

God loves us more than we will ever know. He is waiting for us to surrender ourselves to Him, to love Him, and to embrace justice. May God give us grace to do it in our own lives, and to advocate for justice in the public square. Amen.