

Micah Chapter 3

When we consider the style of writing in the Bible, we find many different forms: words of hope, encouragement and exhortation, but also words of admonition and reproof. Our reading in Malachi chapter 3 brings us to consider the latter aspect – words of reproof to Israel, yet containing principles that relate directly to us. As well as learning from the examples of the faithful of old, we can also learn much from the “example of unbelief” (Heb. 4:11), and this we shall endeavour to do today by way of exhortation.

Micah chapter 3 commences the prophet’s appeal to the leaders of the people:

“And I said, Hear, I pray you, O heads of Jacob, and ye princes of the house of Israel ...”
(Mal. 3:1).

This section of the prophecy is, therefore, to the “heads” and “princes” of the House of Israel. Chapter 1 confirms that Micah’s ministry was to both of the houses of Israel and Judah:

“The word of Yahweh that came to Micah the Moresthite, in the days of Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, which he saw concerning Samaria and Jerusalem ...” (Mic. 1:1).

What follows then, are principles equally applicable to both houses – and also to ourselves, who are part of the “Israel of God” (Gal. 6:16). The chapter continues:

“... it is not for you to know judgment? Who ***hate the good, love the evil ...***

This matches the spiritual condition of the world in which we live. In human nature, “dwelleth no good thing” (Rom. 7:18). There is no natural knowledge of the principles of righteousness that our Maker wishes us to live by – that has to come from without. The natural state of the descendants of Adam is an inclination towards sin, and we have to counter that by imbibing the Word of the Spirit, in order to know how to do good. Then we have an internal battle, as “the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other ...” (Gal. 5:17). Jeremiah many years later said of Israel of old, who rejected such knowledge (Hos 4:6):

“ ... my people is foolish, they have not known me; they are sottish children, and they have none understanding: ***they are wise to do evil, but to do good they have no knowledge***”
(Jer. 4:22).

The leaders to whom Micah spoke hated the good and loved the evil. This situation is a development from the transgression of the first human pair. When created and placed in the Edenic paradise, they knew what was good – the blessings of God were all around them. But when they ate of the proscribed fruit, they obtained a knowledge of evil, as Yahweh Elohim testified: “Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil: and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever, Therefore Yahweh Elohim sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from whence he was taken” (Gen. 3:22-23).

This situation of Israel was the reversal of the state of man before the Fall: before it he knew good, but not evil, after, he knew evil, and neglecting the Word of God, forgot the good. We must be wary

lest we fall after the same example. We must give attendance to the Spirit Word in order that we might know to do the good, and eschew the ways of evil:

“everyone that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. But solid food belongeth to them who by reason of use have their senses exercised **to discern both good and evil**” (Heb. 5:14).

As we say, the only source of knowledge about what is good in the sight of Yahweh is the Word He has imparted to man. We must do the opposite to the example of Israel, as it is written: “he that would love life, and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile: **let him eschew evil, and do good**: let him seek peace and ensue it” (1 Pet. 3:10-11).

After these things, the Prophet continues to describe the leaders as feeding off the people:

“... 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 cauldron” (Mic. 2:2-3).

The heads and princes of Israel sought personal gain (as we shall shortly consider) from the people and fleeced them for what they could get. Rather than to feed the people as Shepherds (Jer. 23:2), they fed off them like ravening wolves. So the Apostle gave the warning about false brethren: “... I know this, that after my departing shall **grievous wolves** enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, **speaking perverse things**, to draw away disciples after them” (Acts 20:29-30).

It is common in modern times to speak of those who believe another Gospel (Gal. 1:6) as having a “different point of view”, or a “different perspective”. That in a free country, every man has God-Given right to believe and teach whatever they choose. But though it would not be politically correct in the eyes of men, the Bible speaks of those “whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole houses, teaching things which they ought not, for filthy lucre’s sake” (Tit. 1:11).

Notice the apostle’s words above: those who teach different things are “speaking perverse things”, not simply expressing an alternative viewpoint. God’s “Word is Truth” (Jno. 17:17), and therefore anything that deviates from it is not “Truth”, but error.

Notice also, the motives for preaching a false gospel: “to draw away disciples after them” after the fashion of Jeroboam of old. Again it is “for filthy lucre’s sake” that they teach these untruths, to be popular amongst men, receiving the praise of men.

This was the spirit of the rulers to whom Micah spoke: they were self-serving, and governed for self-interest. Hence the prophet continued his rebuke:

“The heads thereof judge for reward, and the priests thereof teach for hire, and the prophets thereof divine for money ...” (Mic. 3:11).

Many years later, Malachi, the last of the OT prophets rebuked the priests for having this same spirit:

“Who is there among you that would shut the doors for nought? Neither do ye kindle fire on mine altar for nought. I have no pleasure in you, saith Yahweh of hosts, neither will I accept an offering at your hand” (Ma. 1:10).

They would do nothing “for nought”, not even to close the door, or light the fire for the burnt offerings. We must beware of our own motives: do we seek Yahweh for the loaves and the fishes? Are we motivated out of self-interest, to see what we can obtain for ourselves? Let each examine himself and make that determination.

Turning back to verse 4 of Micah 3, we find that the situation was so bad in the whole house of Israel, that Yahweh had turned against his people, and would hear their petitions no more:

“... then shall they cry unto Yahweh, 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).

It is sometimes thought that Divine favour is unconditional. That the love of God is always unconditionally extended to us. However, the prophecy of Micah proves otherwise: because his people “behaved themselves ill in their doings”, His favour was withdrawn, and His ear would not hear their cries. The teaching of Solomon is that “he that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be abomination” (Prov. 28:9). It logically follows that if we wish Yahweh to hear our prayers, that they be not an “abomination” to Him, we must heed the words of the prophet and the example of his faithless people of old.

It is a characteristic of false prophets that they present a nice message of peace and good things for people to enjoy listening to. By the same token, it is a characteristic of true prophets that they will always speak the Truth, even if and when it is unpalatable. So the false prophets were rebuked by the true prophet Micah:

“Thus saith Yahweh concerning the prophets that make my people err, that bite with their teeth, and cry, Peace; and he putteth not into their mouths, they even prepare war against him” (Mic. 3:5).

And again:

“if a man walking in the spirit and falsehood do lie, saying, I will prophesy unto thee of wine and of strong drink; he shall even be the prophet of this people” (Mic. 2:11).

This situation is as is also expressed by the true prophet Isaiah:

“... this is a rebellious people, lying children, children that will not hear the law of Yahweh: Which say to the seers, See not; and to the prophets, Prophecy not unto us right things, speak unto us smooth things, prophesy deceits” (Isa. 30:9-10).

This is the way of the flesh, men are commended for saying nice things, but scorned for giving words of warning and rebuke. We must be like the Apostle Paul, who said: “I am pure from the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God” (Acts 20:26-27). Even if that word be unpalatable, it must still be spoken. Jeremiah had the same experience: because of what he was teaching the people, he was an object of scorn and derision, and suffered persecution for what he spoke. Yet the Word was as a fire burning within him, and he felt compelled to speak it:

“Since I spake, I cried out, I cried violence and spoil; because the word of Yahweh was made a reproach unto me, and a derision daily. Then I said, I will not make mention of him, nor speak any more in his name. But his word was within mine heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forebearing, and I could not stay” (Jer. 20:8-9).

We do not have the same commission as did the Prophets and Apostles, but there is still a principle here to be observed. Christ is coming back to the earth to judge it, and in the days that remain, we need to proclaim that message to both those who are outside, and also in the household itself. After all, if we don't, who else will?

Turning from the characteristics of the false prophets, we come now to consider the example of Messiah himself. By contrast with Israel, it is written of Jesus:

“Thou hast **loved righteousness, and hated iniquity**; therefore God, even thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows” (Heb. 1:9).

Jesus served for no personal gain in terms of this world's wealth. Rather we are told:

“ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes **he became poor**, that ye through his poverty might be rich” (2 Cor. 8:9).

Messiah was the “lamb of God”, and not a wolf, as John the baptiser declared:

“Behold, **the Lamb of God**, which taketh away the sin of the world” (Jno. 1:29)

Micah 5:1 describes our Master in terms of his suffering:

“they shall smite **the judge of Israel** with a rod upon the cheek” (Mic. 5:1)

And then in verse 5, by contrast to the false cries of peace from the idolatrous prophets:

“... **this man shall be the peace**, when the Assyrian shall come into our land ...” (Mic. 5:5).

The Lord Jesus Christ is the only one that can bring lasting peace: he is, after all, the “prince of peace” (Isa. 9:6). Only by bringing righteousness into the world can peace come, for “the work of righteousness shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance for ever” (Isa. 32:17).

In our Lord Jesus Christ, we have a pattern of righteousness which we must strive to emulate. We have seen the failings of the rulers over God's heritage, and we aspire to be part of the rulership of the age to come. The key principle of all that we have considered, is to love the good and hate the evil. That was the qualification for Messiah to be resurrected (as per Heb. 1:9 above), and it will be the basis for our own glorification. We must seek to follow our Master and his example of righteousness, so that when he comes again it will be peace to us as we will be invited to be a partaker of his glorious Kingdom, the inheritance of the saints in light.

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