

Prophet or Diviner

SCRIPTURE: Micah 3:5-8

INTRODUCTION:

The first verse of this book tells us that the word of Yahweh came to Micah “in the days of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah.” This was in the eighth century B.C. when Assyria was the reigning superpower.

Assyria was located in Mesopotamia, far to the east and north of Israel (the Northern Kingdom) and Judah (the Southern Kingdom), but Assyria’s power was such that it dominated Syria (directly to the north of Israel) as well as Israel.

Jotham inherited the throne of Judah from his father, Uzziah, about 750 B.C. and reigned for about 20 years. Uzziah had enjoyed a long and peaceful reign, but during Jotham’s reign Assyria, under Tiglath-pileser III, became quite powerful and intrusive. Israel (the Northern Kingdom) allied itself with Aram against Assyria, a move that would ultimately spell the downfall of Israel. While 2 Kings notes that Jotham “did that which was right in the eyes of Yahweh” (2 Kings 15:34), it also notes that he failed to remove the high places, which were centers of idol worship.

Ahaz succeeded his father, Jotham, about 730 B.C. and reigned over Judah for 16 years (2 Kings 16:2). He is portrayed as one of Judah’s worst kings (2 Kings 16:3-4). Ignoring the advice of Isaiah, the prophet, who counseled Ahaz to remain neutral, Ahaz sent messengers to Tiglath-pileser of Assyria, saying (2 Kings 16:7) “I am your servant and your son. Come up and save me out of the hand of the king of Syria, and out of the hand of the king of Israel, who rise up against me”. As a result, he became a subordinate of Assyria. During the reign of Ahaz, Tiglath-pileser attacked the Northern Kingdom (Israel), killed many of its inhabitants, and deported most of the survivors to Assyria.

The prophet Micah carried on his work in this turbulent period. In the first chapter of the book of Micah, he foretold the coming Judgement against Israel (vv. 3-7) and Judah (vv. 8-16). In the second chapter, he denounced the social evils prevalent in Israel/Judah. In the third chapter, he speaks of rulers “who hate the

good, and love the evil; who tear off their skin, and their flesh from off their bones” (3:2) and “prophets who lead my people astray” (3:5)—and foretells their punishment.

Nevertheless, in the midst of all these troubles, Micah also foretells days to come when faithfulness and peace would be restored in Judah (4:1-5; see also Isaiah 2:2-4). He promised restoration after exile (4:6-13).

I. MICAH 3:5-7. THUS SAYS YAHWEH CONCERNING THE PROPHETS

⁵Thus says Yahweh concerning the prophets who lead my people astray; for those who feed their teeth, they proclaim, “Peace!” (Hebrew: shalom) and whoever doesn’t provide for their mouths, they prepare war against him: ⁶“Therefore night is over you, with no vision, and it is dark to you, that you may not divine; and the sun will go down on the prophets, and the day will be black over them. ⁷The seers (Hebrew: hozeh—one who sees) shall be disappointed, and the diviners (Hebrew: qasam) confounded. Yes, they shall all cover their lips; for there is no answer from God.”

(v. 5a) “Thus says Yahweh” – Micah begins his indictment of the prophets by citing his authority. He does not speak his own words, but instead speaks the words that Yahweh has spoken to him. This is the role of a prophet—to serve as an intermediary between God and mankind—to speak the words that God has given rather than sharing personal wisdom.

(v. 5b) “concerning the prophets who lead my people astray” – The word which Micah’s received from the Lord, contrast decisively with the words of the false prophets—prophets who fail to lead the people closer to the Lord but instead lead them astray.

In this verse the phrase, “my people” is used. This is personal. The people who are being led astray are the Lord’s beloved people—Micah’s beloved people. To see “my people” injured would be like seeing your own child injured. Watching someone that you love suffering, is to suffer yourself. It must be heartbreaking for the Lord and Micah to see these false prophets lead the people, “my people,” astray.

(v. 5c) “for those who feed their teeth, they proclaim, ‘Peace!’ (shalom) and whoever doesn’t provide for their mouths, they prepare war against him.” These false prophets are like a vending machine, but one with a nasty twist.

- Put money in the slot, and you get a message of peace (shalom). Shalom is more than the absence of warfare. It involves the kind of calm that comes from knowing who you are and where you come from. It involves the kind of prosperity that arises, not from an accumulation of material possessions, but from a thankful spirit. It involves the kind of security that comes from the faith that God loves you and will provide for your needs. When these prophets speak of shalom, they are like a fortune cookie promising a prosperous and happy future.
- With vending machines, if you put nothing in the coin slot, nothing happens. But these prophets, if you give them no money, give curses rather than blessings—war instead of peace. To prepare war, refers to the sacred preparations made in ancient Israel before undertaking a war against God’s enemies, a crusade against infidels” (Allen, 312).

These false prophets are more like Mafia thugs than religious spokesmen. They demand tribute and promise injury if the people fail to pay.

In that culture, it was common for people to give money to prophets, just as people today give money to their church, in part, to pay the preacher. Micah is not challenging the right of prophets to receive gifts that are freely given. He is challenging false prophets who tailor their prophecy according to the gifts offered—and who practice thuggery if no gifts are offered or if they aren’t pleased with the gifts that they receive.

We can be sure that these prophets favor rich people who can afford generous gifts and despise poor people who cannot. This kind of favoritism is absolutely contrary to the message of true prophets of Yahweh. True prophets emphasize generous treatment of widows, orphans, and other vulnerable people.

(v. 6) “Therefore night is over you, with no vision, and it is dark to you, that you may not divine; and the sun will go down on the prophets, and the day will be black over them”. Micah does not say that these false prophets do not possess

prophetic powers. He implies that they have the gift of prophecy and are quite capable of leading people rightly. The problem isn't that they do not possess the gift of prophecy, but that they have misused their gift.

Therefore, as a consequence of their betrayal, the Lord will take their gift of prophecy from them—the punishment perfectly fitted to the crime. These false prophets have enjoyed vision and light and revelation, but they will find their spiritual eyes blinded and the sun setting on their gift of prophecy. They who have enjoyed daylight will be pitched into the darkness of night. The blackness that will come over them is a spiritual darkness that suggests a difficult, gloomy existence.

(v. 7a) “The seers (hozeh (ho sa) — one who sees) shall be disappointed, and the diviners (qasam) confounded.” The word “seer” (ho sa) is generally used positively in the Hebrew Scriptures, most often as a synonym for “prophet.” The word “diviner” (qasam) is generally used negatively (Deuteronomy 18:10, 14; 1 Samuel 15:23; 2 Kings 17:17; Jeremiah 14:14; Ezekiel 13:6, 23). Micah, of course, would be familiar with the distinction between these two words. It seems likely that he pairs them in this verse to acknowledge the legitimate function of the prophets whom he is addressing (seers) and to highlight the illegitimate way that they have used their gifts (diviners).

Not only will these prophets lose their gift of prophecy (v. 6), but they will also be disgraced and put to shame.

(v. 7b) “Yes, they shall all cover their lips; for there is no answer from God” Covering the lip is associated with mourning (Ezekiel 24:17, 22) and distress (Leviticus 13:45). “Ironically, (covering their lips) will also be a fitting sign that they have nothing to say” (Allen, 313).

II. MICAH 3:8. FULL OF POWER BY THE SPIRIT OF YAHWEH

⁸But as for me, I am full of power by the Spirit of Yahweh, and of judgment, (Hebrew: mis·pat) and of might (Hebrew: geburah), to declare to Jacob his disobedience, and to Israel his sin.

(v. 8a) “But as for me, I am full of power by the Spirit of Yahweh, and of judgment (mis·pat), and of might” (geburah). Micah draws a sharp contrast between his status as an authentic prophet and that of the false prophets. They have been dishonorable, and as a result will experience the waning of their powers, the dark of night, being cut off from the Lord, and disgrace. Micah, on the other hand, is full of power, because he is filled with the spirit of the Lord. The power that he enjoys is not personal power, but Godly power.

Micah is also filled with justice (mis·pat). God’s law provides specific guidance with regard to just behavior. It requires witnesses to be honest and impartial (Exodus 23:1-3, 6-8). It requires special consideration for widows, orphans, and other vulnerable people (Deuteronomy 24:17). While Israel is always tempted to define its service to God by the performance of duties (ritual sacrifice, Sabbath observance, etc.), the prophets keep reminding them that justice is a basic duty of the faith community. Micah 6:8, “He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth Jehovah require of thee, but to do justly, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with they God?”

Justice (mis·pat) and righteousness (seda·qa) are related. Justice involves bringing people into a right relationship with Yahweh and each other, and these right relationships produce righteous lives. This is quite different from what the false prophets have been doing.

Micah is also filled with might (geburah). This is a word often used for God’s might (Deuteronomy 3:24; 1 Chronicles 29:12, Job 26:14; Psalm 65:6; 66:7) and for the courage of Godly people (Judges 8:21). Courage and might are related. A courageous person will not fear to say what needs to be said and to do what needs to be done. A courageous person does not sacrifice truth for the appearance of peace.

That is the case with Micah. To take on the establishment—both civil and the religious authorities—is a frightening prospect—and that is exactly what Micah is doing here. Just before he began addressing the prophets, he denounced the civil rulers (3:1-4). Prophets are often killed for such presumption (1 Kings 18:13; Jeremiah 2:30; Luke 13:34; 1 Thessalonians 2:15; Hebrews 11:37; Revelation 16:6).

Micah is surely aware that the Lord sometimes allows his prophets to suffer, but he speaks boldly nevertheless—speaks boldly because he is filled with might (geburah – ge-beer-a).

(v. 8b) “to declare to Jacob his disobedience, and to Israel his sin” This is what the false prophets should have been doing. Prophets are supposed to be truth-tellers—telling the truths that God has revealed to them.

Jacob and Israel, of course, are two different names for the same man (Genesis 32:28). His descendants became the nation Israel. Later, when the nation split into two, it became the Northern Kingdom (Israel) and the Southern Kingdom (Judah). Micah is addressing the situation in Judah, so he means his reference to Jacob and Israel to mean Judah.

In this case, people have been guilty of sin, and the false prophets should have been confronting them with that. Instead, the false prophets have been preaching peace and prosperity (shalom) to paying customers and declaring war on those who fail to line their pockets (5c).

Micah, by contrast, is doing the work of a prophet—doing the Lord’s work—boldly challenging transgression and sin. It is unpleasant work, because prophets are seldom popular—and it can also be dangerous. But the test of a true prophet is that he speaks the words that the Lord has given him—in season and out of season.