

CHAPTER 3

INTRODUCTION TO MICAH 3

In this chapter the prophet reproveth and threatens both princes and prophets, first separately, and then conjunctly; first the heads and princes of the people, civil magistrates, for their ignorance of justice, and hatred of good, and love of evil, and for their oppression and cruelty; and they are threatened with distress when they should cry unto the Lord, and should not be heard by him, (^{<310>}Micah 3:1-4); next the prophets are taken to task, for their voraciousness, avarice, and false prophesying; and are threatened with darkness, with want of vision, and of an answer from the Lord, and with shame and confusion, (^{<310>}Micah 3:5-7); and the prophet being full of the Spirit and power of God, to declare the sins and transgressions of Jacob and Israel, (^{<310>}Micah 3:8), very freely declaims against princes, priests, and prophets, all together; who, though guilty of very notorious crimes, yet were in great security, and promised themselves impunity, (^{<310>}Micah 3:9-11); wherefore the city and temple of Jerusalem are threatened with an utter desolation, (^{<310>}Micah 3:12).

Ver. 1. *And I said, hear, I pray you, O heads of Jacob, and ye princes of the house of Israel*, etc.] This seems to be a new sermon or discourse, delivered at another time and to another people than the preceding for, as that chiefly concerns the ten tribes, this the two tribes of Judah and Benjamin, and was spoken to them in the times of Hezekiah, as appears from (^{<310>}Jeremiah 26:18); for though Jacob and Israel generally design the ten tribes, yet here the other two, as is manifest from the above cited place, and also from (^{<310>}Micah 3:9,10,12); and not only heads of families, but such as were the highest posts under the government, the sanhedrim of the nation, judges, rulers, and nobles, are here addressed; and who had a great share in national guilt, being ringleaders in sin, who ought to have set good examples to others; and these are not to be spared because of their grandeur and dignity, but to faithfully reprove for their vices, and which they should diligently attend unto; though they are to be addressed in a respectful and honourable manner, and be entreated to hearken to the word of the Lord by his prophet; all which was carefully observed by Micah; and

it was with pleasure he could reflect upon his plain, faithful, and affectionate reproof of those great men:

[is it] not for you to know judgment? what is just and right to be done by men, and what sentence is to be passed in courts of judicature, in cases brought before them and not only to know, in a speculative way, what is equitable, but to practise it themselves, and see that it is done by others; and when they duly considered this, they would be able to see and own that what the prophet from the Lord would now charge them with, or denounce upon them, was according to truth and justice.

Ver. 2. *Who hate the good, and love the evil,* etc.] Instead of knowing and doing what was just and right; or, directly contrary to their light and knowledge, and the duty of their office, they hated that which is good, which is agreeable to the law, nature, and will of God, and loved that which is evil, which is contrary thereunto; or they hated to do good, and loved to do evil, as the Targum; as men do who are averse to good, and prone to evil; or they hated a good man, as Aben Ezra, and loved the evil man; not only delighted in committing sin themselves, but took pleasure in those that did it; and could not endure the company and conversation of holy and good men:

who pluck off their skin from off them, and their flesh from off their bones: like wild beasts that tear off skin and flesh from the bones, and then devour them; or like cruel shepherds, that, not content to fleece their flocks, skin them, and take their flesh also, and feed themselves, and not the flock; or like butchers, that first take off the skin off a beast, and then cut up its flesh. The design of the expressions is to show what rigour, cruelty, and oppressions, these rulers exercised on the people and by their heavy taxes and levies, and exorbitant penalties and fines, pillaged and plundered them of all they had in the world, and left them quite bare, as bones stripped of their skin and flesh. So the Targum,

“seizing on their substance by violence, and their precious mammon they take away.”

Ver. 3. *Who also eat the flesh of my people, and flay their skins from off them,* etc.] Like cannibals, flay them alive, and then eat their flesh: this signifies, as before, devouring their substance, only expressed in terms which still more set forth their savageness, inhumanity, barbarity, and cruelty. So the Targum,

“who spoil the substance of my people, and their precious mammon they take from them;”

and what aggravated their guilt was, that they were the Lord’s people by profession and religion they so used; whom he had committed to their care to rule over, protect, and defend:

and they break their bones, and chop them in pieces as for the pot, and as flesh within the caldron: did with them as cooks do, who not only cut flesh off the bones, and into slices, but break the bones themselves, to get out the marrow, and chop them small, that they may have all the virtue that is in them, to make their soup and broth the richer; by which is signified, that these wicked and avaricious rulers took every method to squeeze the people, and get all their wealth and riches into their hands, that they might have in a more riotous and luxurious manner.

Ver. 4. *Then shall they cry unto the Lord, but he will not hear them,* etc.]

When all the above evils threatened them in the preceding chapters shall come upon them; when the enemy shall invade their hind, besiege their cities, and take them, and they, their families and substance, just ready to fall into their hands, they shall cry unto the Lord; or pray unto him, as the Targum, in the time of their distress; but he will not hear their prayer, so as to answer it according to their desire; that is, he will not save them from imminent danger, but deliver them up, them, and all that belong unto them, into the hands of such that shall use them as they have done others:

he will even hide his face from them at that time; turn his back upon them, and a deaf ear to them, and show them no favour, nor grant them any help and protection:

as they have behaved themselves ill in their doings; he will punish them according to the law of retaliation; as when the poor cried unto them, when they were stripping them of their substance, and they would not hearken to them, so now, when they cry unto the Lord in their distress, he will not hearken to them; and as they turned their backs, and hid their faces from those that were afflicted by them, and would show them no favour, so will the Lord deal with them; and as they exercised the utmost cruelty and barbarity that could be done, they will now be given up into the hands of cruel and merciless men, that will use them in like manner: or, “because they have done ill in their doings”^{f122} to the poor, whose cause God will defend and vindicate.

Ver. 5. *Thus saith the Lord, concerning the prophets that make my people err,* etc.] The false prophets, as the Targum; and as the description given of them shows; who, instead of directing the people in the right way, as by their office and characters as prophets they should have done, they led them into mistakes about matters of religion and civil government, and out of the way of their duty to God and men, and exposed them to great danger and distress; and this was the more aggravating, as they were the Lord's people by name and profession, whom they caused to err from his ways and worship, which brought his displeasure upon them:

that bite with their teeth, and cry, peace; prophesy smooth things, promise all kind of prosperity and plenty, and bite their lips, and keep in those distresses and calamities which they could not but see coming upon the people; or, while they are prophesying good things, they gnash their teeth against the prophets of the Lord, and bitterly inveigh against them for threatening with war, destruction, and captivity; or, by flattering the people with their lips, they bite them, devour their substance, and are the cause of their hurt and ruin; or rather, so long as the people fed them well, and they had a sufficiency to bite and live upon, they foretold happy days unto them, So the Targum,

“he that feeds them with a feast of flesh, they prophesy peace to him;”

which sense is confirmed by what follows,

and he that putteth not into their mouth, they even declare war against him; who do not give them what they ask, or do not feed them according to their desire, do not keep a good table for them, and cram and pamper them, but neglect them, and do not provide well for them; these they threaten with one calamity or another that shall befall them; and endeavour to set their neighbours against them, and even the government itself, and do them all the mischief they can by defamation and slander.

Ver. 6. *Therefore night [shall be] unto you, that ye shall not have a vision,* etc.] Not that those outward gifts and illuminations, and that prophetic light they had, or seemed to have should be taken away from them, and it should be quite a night with them; because these men were never sent of God, or received any message from him, or had any prophetic talents at all, and therefore could not be taken away from them, and they be benighted in this sense; though, it is true, such might be the circumstances

they would be brought into, that it should appear to the people that they are the dark persons they were, that they have no vision, nor never had any; but rather the sense is, that such dark providences and dreadful calamities should come upon the people in general, and upon those prophets in particular, often signified by “night” in Scripture, that they would not have the face to pretend any more that they had any vision from God of good times and things. It may be rendered, “therefore night [shall be] unto you because of vision”^{f123}; calamity should come upon them because of their false and pretended visions of peace and prosperity they deluded the people with:

and it shall be dark unto you, that ye shall not divine; such darkness of affliction should be upon them, that they would not offer to deliver out any divination or prediction of good things coming upon them; or such darkness and distress would be their portion “because of divination”^{f124}, on account of their lying divinations they had imposed upon the people:

and the sun shall go down over the prophets, and the day shall be dark over them; their time of prosperity will be over, and they shall be no more in favour with the people, or courted and feasted by them; but shall be had in the utmost contempt and abhorrence. The Targum of the whole is,

“therefore ye shall blush at prophesying, and be ashamed of teaching; and tribulation as darkness shall cover the false prophets, and the time shall be darkened upon them.”

Ver. 7. *Then shall the seers be ashamed, and the diviners confounded*, etc.] When the events of things will make it most clearly appear to all that their visions, divinations, and prophecies, are false; they will not be able to lift up their heads, or show their faces, but shame and confusion will cover them:

yea, they shall all cover their lips; stop their mouths, hold their tongues, and be entirely and totally silenced; they will not pretend to utter any other vision or prophecy; nor be able to say one word in defence of themselves, and of what they have before prophesied; every thing in providence being contrary to what they had said, and agreeable to the words of the true prophets; or they shall cover their lips as mourners; as the Targum adds, by way of explanation; (see ^{אֲרָאָה}Ezekiel 24:17,22). It is said^{f125} there were two gates in Solomon’s temple; one called the gate of the bridegrooms, the other the gate of mourners; to those that entered the latter, if their lip was

covered, it was said, he that dwells in this house comfort thee; and so the lips of the false prophets being covered may signify that they were now sorry for what they had done, at least because of the calamities on them and the people; though the former sense seems best:

for [there is] no answer of God; not that they shall be ashamed and silenced because they shall now have no answer of God, for they never had any, which this would imply; but that it shall now be most plain and clear to all that the Lord never spoke by them, and they never had any answer from him; all their visions, divinations, and prophecies, were of, themselves, and not of him; what they delivered was not the word of the Lord, but their own; and this now being discovered and manifest to everyone, wilt put them to utter silence and shame. The Targum is,

“for there is not in them a spirit of prophecy from the Lord.”

Ver. 8. *But truly I am full of power by the Spirit of the Lord,* etc.] Or, “full of power, even, the Spirit of the Lord”, as Gussetius^{f126}, by way of contrast, and as explaining what is meant by power; for so the Spirit is sometimes called from his gifts and graces, which are powerful in men; (see ~~2247~~Luke 24:47 ~~4008~~Acts 1:8 ~~4015~~6:5,8). These are the words of Micah concerning himself, in opposition to the false prophets, who are destitute of the Spirit of God; men of mean sordid dispositions, that had nothing but sinister and selfish ends in view, and not in the least qualified for the office and character they bore; whereas he could say of himself, with truth, that he was possessed of sufficient abilities for such an employment; and which he had, not of himself, but from the Spirit of God, who gives gifts to men, and divides them to each as he will; so that this was no vaunt and vain boast, or a piece of arrogance and ostentation in the prophet; since he only opposes himself to the false prophets, and ascribes his endowments and qualifications, not to himself, but to the Spirit of God; he had, though they had not, answers from the Lord, visions and prophecies from him, with a commission and abilities from him to execute the office of a prophet, being under the inspiration of the Spirit of God, and full of him and his gifts:

and of judgment, and of might; or of the judgment of truth, as the Targum; being able to discern truth and error, between what comes from the Spirit of God, and what from a lying spirit, or a spirit of divination and falsehood; what is proper to, be spoken, when the right time, and to whom; and having courage and greatness of mind, fearing no man’s person or face, but bold

to declare unto Jacob his transgression, and to Israel his sin; freely and openly to set it before them in a true light, with all aggravating circumstances, and reprove them for the same; and threaten them with the judgments of God in case they, repented not; (see ⁻²⁸⁰¹⁻Isaiah 58:1); and as a proof of all this, says what follows:

Ver. 9. *Hear this, I pray you, ye heads of the house of Jacob, and princes of the house of Israel,* etc.] As an instance of his boldness, courage, and impartiality, he begins with the principal men of the land, and charges them with sins, and reproves for them, and denounces judgments on account of them; (see Gill on "⁻³³⁰¹⁻Micah 3:1");

that abhor judgment, and pervert all equity; a sad character of princes, rulers, and judges, who not only ought to know but to love judgment, justice, and equity, and do them; even take delight and pleasure in the distribution of them to everyone, and in every cause that came before them; but, instead of this, hated to do that which was right and just; and perverted all the rules and laws of justice and equity, clearing the guilty, and condemning the innocent.

Ver. 10. *They build up Zion with blood, and Jerusalem with iniquity.*] Or, "O thou that buildest up"^{f127}, etc. or "everyone of them that buildeth up"^{f128}, etc. for the word is in the singular number; but, be fire words rendered either of these ways, they respect the heads and princes of the people; who either repaired the temple on Zion, or ornamented the king's palace, or built themselves fine stately houses in Jerusalem, or large streets there, by money they took of murderers to save them, as Kimchi; or by money got by rapine and oppression, by spoiling the poor of their goods and their livelihood, for them and their families, which was all one as shedding innocent blood; and by money obtained by bribes, for the perversion of justice, and such like illegal proceedings, truly called iniquity. The Targum is,

"who build their houses in Zion with bloodshed, and Jerusalem with deceits."

Ver. 11. *The heads thereof judge for reward,* etc.] That is, the heads or principal men of Zion and Jerusalem; the kings, or sanhedrim, according to Kimchi; but as this prophecy was delivered in the times of Hezekiah, (⁻²⁴³⁸⁻Jeremiah 26:18), he who was so good a king must be excepted from this charge; perhaps it was delivered in the beginning of his reign, before a

reformation was made, and might be the occasion of it: the former reign was a very wicked one; and very likely the public officers, judges, and civil magistrates, were as yet continued, and who went on in the same course of injustice, giving the cause not on the right side, but to them that gave them most money, or bribed highest, contrary to the law of God, (~~16:19~~ Deuteronomy 16:19);

and the priests thereof teach for hire; for though they had a sufficient and honourable maintenance provided by the law of God for them, yet, not content with this, they took a price of the people for teaching them; and that not such things as were agreeable to the will of God declared in his word, which they ought to have done freely; but such doctrines as were most pleasing to carnal men, and indulged them in their lusts, presumption, and vain confidence:

and the prophets thereof divine for money; tell men what should befall them; what good things they should be possessed of; what plenty and prosperity they should enjoy; and this they did according to the sum of money given them, more or less. This must be understood of the false prophets:

yet will they lean upon the Lord; on his care, providence, and protection, as if they were filled to these things, and might securely rely and depend upon them; though by their sins and transgressions they had forfeited all the bent fits and privileges thereof. To lean by faith upon the Lord; or in his Word, as the Targum; and to trust in his promises, in his power, and faithfulness, and goodness; when this springs from an honest and upright heart, and is attended with the fruits of righteousness and holiness, it is well pleasing to God, and highly regarded by him, and such may, depend upon his blessing and protection; but to talk of faith in him, and reliance upon him, when the whole course of the conversation is wicked, this is abominable in the sight of God, and displeasing to him:

and say, [is] not the Lord among us? trusting to this, that the temple of the Lord was among them, and that the temple of God were they; that the most holy place was there, where were the symbols of the divine Presence, the ark, cherubim, and mercy seat; and so concluding from hence their safety and security; putting their confidence in outward places and things, in external worship, sacrifices, rites, and ceremonies, when they neglected the weightier matters of the law, justice, truth, and mercy: and so

none evil can come upon us: as pestilence, famine, sword, and captivity, the prophets of the Lord had threatened them with.

Ver. 12. *Therefore shall Zion for your sake be ploughed [as] a field*, etc.]

That is, for your sins, as the Targum; for the bloodshed, injustice, and avarice of the princes, priests, and prophets; not that the common people were free from crimes; but these are particularly mentioned, as being ringleaders into sin, and who ought to have set better examples; as also to take off their vain confidence in themselves, who thought that Zion and Jerusalem would be built up and established by them, and preserved for their sakes; as well as to show the prophet's boldness and intrepidity in his rebukes and menaces of them: now this was prophesied of in the days of Hezekiah, before the invasion of Judea and siege of Jerusalem by Sennacherib; it was deferred upon the repentance and reformation of the people; and was fulfilled in part at the destruction of Jerusalem by the Chaldeans, when the city was reduced to a heap of rubbish; and more fully when it was destroyed by the Romans, and ploughed up by Terentius, or Turnus Rufus, as the Jews say; so that there was not a house or building left upon it, but it became utterly desolate and uninhabited, especially in the reign of Adrian:

and Jerusalem shall become heaps; not only the city of David, built on Mount Zion, should be demolished, but the other part of the city called Jerusalem should be thrown down, and its walls and houses lie in heaps, like heaps of stones in the midst of a ploughed field:

and the mountain of the house as the high places of the forest; Mount Moriah, on which the temple was built; hence called here, by the Targum, the mountain of the house of the sanctuary; the temple upon it should be destroyed, and not one, tone left upon another; and the place on which it stood be covered with grass and trees, with briars and thorns, as a forest is, all which have been exactly fulfilled. The Jews say^{f129} of Turnus Rufus before mentioned, that he both ploughed up the city of Jerusalem, and the temple, the ground on which they stood; and Jerom^{f130} affirms the temple was ploughed up by Titus Annius Ruffus; which, as it literally fulfilled this prophecy, denotes the utter destruction of them; for, as it was usual with the ancients to mark out with a plough the ground on which a city was designed to be built; so they drew one over the spot where any had stood, which was become desolate, and to signify that the city was no more to be

rebuilt and inhabited: thus Seneca^{f131}, Horace^{f132}, and other writers, express the utter destruction of a city by such phrases.