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Title: What About America

Text: Micah 3

This morning, I'd like us to look at Micah chapter 3. This is a passage located in the Minor Prophets. It is not Minor because of its message or importance. It is named a Minor Prophet because of its length - because the message here is shorter than that of the Major Prophets. Here Micah, the Prophet, has an important word for Israel. Later in Micah, he speaks of blessings, but here he addresses Israel's faults. Anyone here ever make a mistake? Maybe I should ask how many have never made a mistake? A smart man learns from his own mistakes. A smarter man learns from the mistakes of others. The smartest man never makes any mistakes. Since we have none of the latter here, perhaps the best we can do is learn from the mistakes of others.

Can America learn from the mistakes of Israel? When we go back to Genesis 12, we see that God had great plans for Israel. Genesis 12:2-3 - *"And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: ³And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed."* This was a five-fold promise: 1. Make thee a great nation. 2. Bless thee. 3. Make thy name great. (As I see it, Israel has received more press than any other country of this world.) 4. God blesses Israel to be a blessing. 5. In thee all the families of the earth are to be blessed. Yet in Micah 3, we see that Israel is at a place because of their actions and sometimes lack of actions, where their blessings from God are in jeopardy. You see, God can't honor and bless THEM in their disobedience. Neither can God bless US in our disobedience.

I love America. Having lived here for exactly 61 years (and 2 days), it's what I know best. Apart from 3 weeks in Jamaica on mission trips, a week or so in Israel, and a week in Canada, I've spent my life here. I enjoy her freedoms, especially my freedom to worship the true and living God. I still believe the United States is the greatest country on the face of the earth. God HAS blessed us. But I have my concerns. That could change. Micah 4:3 says, *"And he shall judge among many people, and rebuke strong nations afar off;"* Could that be a word for America? I love America, but I don't have to like the direction she is heading in. Could our country actually be facing God's judgment for its offenses against Him? If so, who is at fault? I believe terrorism is a great threat to the USA. But I don't know that it is our greatest threat. Yes, evil exists and is growing rampantly. I am concerned that America's greatest threat might not be from without but may be from within. We are our own worst enemy and I am convinced that God is generally displeased with us as a nation. He is assigning blame for sin and we must answer.

In Micah 3, the prophet is concerned about something. He wants his nation to know that the God they serve is not only a God of love, mercy, and grace, but ALSO a God of JUDGMENT...and though God would rather bless and demonstrate love, and continue to extend His grace and mercy, that there comes a time when, because of sin and rebellion, God's patience is exhausted. Eventually God will give a nation [or an individual] what they are demanding. The law of the harvest says, "We reap what we sow." It happened in NOAH's time, and again at SODOM and GOMORRAH. It even happened to God's people, ISRAEL. Will He make an exception for our nation? How could He?

Micah speaks by the Spirit of God and points a finger at three distinct groups of people and says, "It's Your Fault!": In verse 1 and 9, it's the leaders and rulers of Israel. In verse 5, it's the prophets. In verse 8, it's the people - it's citizens who have turned against God and sinned. In verse 11, it's the leaders, the priests, and the prophets. The "they" in verse 11 refers to Israel and its citizens. Micah desperately wants the people to understand that the God who loves sinners still hates sin. And sin must always be judged. His holiness demands that. I am ever grateful for the work Jesus did on the cross 2,000 years ago. He bore my sin on the cross. The Bible tells me in 1 John 1:9 - *"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."* The forgiveness of my sin is conditional on the confession - the repenting, the turning away from - my sin. The Bible also tells us that we will be judged for how faithful we have been. All individuals will one day be judged, and there is such a thing as the judgment of a nation. Again, Micah 4:3 says, *"And he shall judge among many people, and rebuke strong nations afar off;"* Micah 3:12 talks about a nation being *"plowed as a field,"* a metaphor for judgment. No nation was as pure in its inception as the nation Israel. Yet even Israel went corrupt, and the vast majority of the people were ignorant or indifferent concerning that corruption. For that reason, the prophets of judgment came along, like Micah, calling the people to repentance, and making the people aware that the God who would RATHER BLESS will BLAST if His hand is forced. I want to be optimistic about our nation's possibilities for the future, yet we need to be realistic. Now is not the time when we can afford to be ignorant, indifferent or complacent. And part of my loving America is wanting to save her

from a corruption that many, if not most people are seemingly ignorant of...or at least indifferent to.

- 1. Fault #1 - Corrupt Politicians.** Micah 3:1-3 - *"Then I said, 'Listen, leaders of the people of Jacob; listen, you rulers of the nation of Israel. You should know how to decide cases fairly, ²but you hate good and love evil. You skin my people alive and tear the flesh off their bones. ³You eat my people's flesh and skin them and break their bones; you chop them up like meat for the pot, like meat in a cooking pan.'"* Here's a word to the leaders and rulers of Israel. They hate good and love evil. And whatever the rest of verse 2 and verse 3 is saying, it's quite clear that it is not something anyone would want for a leader/ruler. In verse 9-11 we read, *"Leaders of Jacob and rulers of Israel, listen to me, you who hate fairness and twist what is right. ¹⁰You build Jerusalem by murdering people; you build it with evil. ¹¹Its judges take money to decide who sins in court."* NBC's Tom Brokaw used to do a weekly segment called "The Fleecing of America." It highlighted the price Americans pay at the hands of corrupt politicians and leadership. Some of the word of Micah 3 sounds like something that could have come from Brokaw's teleprompter. How many times have we heard how one of our public servants (many of whom are not servants at all) have been investigated or incarcerated for criminal activity. We have politicians running for office today who are under investigation. Many of the politicians who were charged with upholding our legal and judicial system are themselves violators of that legal and judicial system. Here are six requirements God recommends for government leaders [from Proverbs]: **1. Righteousness** - *"When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice: but when the wicked beareth rule, the people mourn" (29:2). "It is an abomination to kings to commit wickedness: for the throne is established by righteousness" (16:12).* Why is it that today we just look for skills and credentials, and OVERLOOK righteousness, integrity, and morality? In looking at the finances of those running for office, I'm concerned that our elections are a matter of who can buy the most votes. **2. Wisdom** - *"I, wisdom, dwell with prudence, and find out knowledge and discretion. ¹³The fear of the Lord is to hate evil; Pride and arrogance and the evil way and the perverse mouth I hate. ¹⁴Counsel is mine, and sound wisdom; I am understanding, I have strength. ¹⁵By me kings reign, and rulers decree justice. ¹⁶By me princes rule, and nobles, all the judges of the earth" (8:12-16).* Although some say that ignorance is bliss, God never puts a premium on ignorance. The Apostle Paul says that he *"would not have you ignorant concerning spiritual gifts (spiritual things)."* **3. Absolute Honesty** - *"Excellent speech becometh not a fool: much less do lying lips a prince" (Proverbs 17:7).* Leaders and liars should never be the same thing! **4. Separation from bad influences** - *"Take away the dross from the silver, and there shall come forth a vessel for the finer. ⁵Take away the wicked from before the king, and his throne shall be established in righteousness" (Proverbs 25:4-5).* A leader must focus on what is right, not just public opinion or lobbying pressures or one's own financial gain. He MUST separate himself from the wrong. **5. Personal Purity** - *"Give not thy strength unto women, nor thy ways to that which destroyeth kings" (Proverbs 31:3).* If a man will not honor his marriage vows, what's he going to do with those "piddly little vows" of public trust? **6. Protection of the weak and the defenseless** - *"Open thy mouth for the dumb in the cause of all such as are appointed to destruction. ⁹Open thy mouth, judge righteously, and plead the cause of the poor and needy" (Proverbs 31:8-9).* A leader is to speak for those who cannot speak for themselves, and defend those who cannot defend themselves. A Biblical leader should stand tall on behalf of the unborn. Some would say, "Abortion is legal and a leader is supposed to uphold the law!" Certainly being LEGALLY RIGHT doesn't make something MORALLY RIGHT! *"Shall the throne of iniquity have fellowship with thee, which frameth mischief by a law?" (Psalm 94:20).* And, I should add that those who stand for the unborn but turn a blind eye to the poor, offend God as well. When Micah warns the people that God is about to judge, he points first at the corrupt politicians, and says, "It's your fault." And until we own our faults, there is no hope for a change.
- 2. Fault #2 – Compromising Preachers.** Micah 3:5 – *The Lord says this about the prophets who teach his people the wrong way of living: 'If these prophets are given food to eat, they shout, 'Peace!' But if someone doesn't give them what they ask for, they call for a holy war against that person.'"* Should the preacher or prophet be preaching peace when judgment is coming? Should the prophet cater to the offering plates, altering their message so as not to offend? *"Its priests only teach for pay, and its prophets only look into the future when they get paid" (3:11).* It appears that the message of the priests and prophets, during this time, were selected on the basis of what topic would bring in the most money. It's a self-centered message – "What's best for ME?" Not what's best for the Kingdom. Not even what's best for the people. And do we today really need to drag Jesus down to a lower level in an attempt to make Him more palatable? Did not Jesus Himself say, *"Come unto Me"?* When a preacher invites someone to Jesus, he must present Jesus and all He is without compromise. We must preach the truth at all times irregardless of the cost. And it is vital that we practice what we preach. As people

of God, we must, at times, look inside ourselves with humility. Some sermons are pretty hard to preach. As a parent, I'd rather put my arm around my child and tell her how wonderful she is, but sometimes as a parent, we have to address issues and make our child responsible for his or her actions. Most preachers, myself included, would rather proclaim to you the love, grace and mercy of our God. But if I neglect to tell you of the judgment of God, I believe I've done you a great disservice. Today's message is not one I prepared out of joy, but rather responsibility – of duty. I'm deeply concerned about some of what I hear coming from our pulpits. I've seen some TV evangelists spend 90% of their airtime speaking of money, and if you're lucky they'll give Jesus a mention or two before signing off. Someone described a recent church service as a variety of forms of entertainment followed by a seven-minute homily. Maybe it's just me, but it takes me more than seven minutes to tell if some of you are alive! Know that I'm not against entertainment. I'm not even against a seven-minute devotional. But God help us if that's our only feeding of the week! I enjoy a snack. But a snack can't take the place of my meal. Back some time ago, I recall listening to Barbara Walters interview the pastor of a megachurch. She remarked to him that he never preaches concerning abortion, gay marriages or sin, and he agreed. Basically he said, "That's right. We don't address anything controversial. It's not for me to judge." I'm concerned that there are many people sitting in churches that don't even know the fundamentals of The Word because they are sitting under a "cotton candy" theology that tastes good, but has no substance. Mind you, I'm not talking about delivery. I'm talking about CONTENT. I'm amazed at the number of preachers who proclaim that Jesus is A way to salvation. My Bible says Jesus is THE way – the ONLY WAY! *"There is no other name under heaven given among men whereby we are saved"* (Acts 4:12). Jesus said to the Rabbi Nicodemus, *"He that believeth NOT is condemned already..."* (John 3:18) and *"You MUST be born again"* (John 3:3). Jesus didn't worry about being judgmental. What was the result? Nicodemus became a believer (John 7:50; 19:39). We live in a day where many so-called "FULL GOSPEL" preachers are only preaching HALF the Gospel! So many limit their teaching to the parts that the world will approve of. See what Paul says about this – Acts 20:20-21, 26-27 - ²⁰*"I kept back nothing that was profitable to you, but have showed you, and have taught you publicly, and from house to house,* ²¹*Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward Jesus Christ...* ²⁶*Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men.* ²⁷*For I have not shunned to declare unto you the whole counsel of God."* Galatians 1:6-10 – ⁶*"I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—⁷which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ.* ⁸*But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned!* ⁹*As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned!* ¹⁰*Am I now trying to win the approval of men, or of God? Or am I trying to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ."* Perhaps I should add that God uses us in our differences and He doesn't violate our individual personalities. God does use us as we are. God hasn't stamped preachers out of cookie cutter molds. There are no two believers alike. Certainly there are no two preachers alike. One's personality will have a part, if not in WHAT one preaches, in HOW one preaches a particular message. I know that. But there can be no excuse for compromising the Gospel of Jesus. We are all different – some of us MORE different than others. Our differences are important to the Kingdom. Our delivery may be different, but we must strive as Paul to preach the WHOLE counsel of God. As Paul said, when you hear a gospel different than the Gospel of Jesus, you better RUN! When Micah warns the people that God is about to judge, he points at not only the corrupt politicians, but also the compromising preachers and says, "It's your fault." WE must own our faults before God.

3. **Fault #3 – Complacent People.** Micah 3:11 – *"Its judges take money to decide who wins in court. Its priests only teach for pay, and its prophets only look into the future when they get paid. But they lean on the Lord and say, 'The Lord is here with us, so nothing bad will happen to us.'* The word "they" is where the complacent people appear. The people of Israel said, "We know the politicians are corrupt, we know the preachers are compromisers, but it will be okay, because we're okay." The economy is strong, we're happy, and it's alright. *"Is not the Lord among us? No evil can touch us."* Many ignorant Americans make a similar claim: "Our nation has a CHRISTIAN heritage. We have GODLY roots." SO DID ISRAEL! And so did many other nations which God has judged – some of which He wiped out completely. I'm here to say that we must pursue hard after God or destruction will overtake us as well. The truth of the matter is that they weren't alright anyway. Verse 8 says, Tell the people of Jacob how they have turned against God. Tell the people of Israel how they have sinned. So things really weren't as they stated. They were ignorant of their real condition. They were indifferent and

complacent. They weren't righteous. They were by the declaration of the prophet, unrighteous. So being in a country founded on righteous principles isn't enough. Church membership and church attendance isn't enough. Yesterday's righteousness doesn't negate today's unrighteousness. Proverbs 14:34 still holds true – *“Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people.”*

- 4. CONCLUSION: Where do we go from here?** We should do our part to elect leaders that seek to fulfill God's righteous requirements. Here we are at that time when candidates are declaring their run for president. Before this calendar year is over, a new president will have been elected. On January 20th – just a little over six months from now, a new president is to step into office. Listen to what the candidates are saying. You would also do well to look at their past voting record to make sure they aren't just saying something to secure your vote. As a believer, we have both a privilege and a responsibility to vote. If you haven't registered, do so. **MAKE SURE YOU VOTE!** If you can't make it to the voting precinct, there is a procedure for an absentee ballot. And what do we do if – or should I say **WHEN** – corrupt politicians come to power? We may not be able to control such a situation, but we certainly can focus on ourselves and make sure we aren't compromising preachers and complacent parishioners. We would do well to remember the command and promise of 2 Chronicles 7:14 – *“If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.”* Humble yourself. Pray and seek God's face. Turn from **YOUR WICKED WAYS**. It is true – I think our nation is in trouble. But I also know that Jesus Christ is the **HOPE** of our nation and the world. He stands as a light for us to follow. His arms of mercy are open to those who will turn from selfishness and evil to Him. Certainly He extends His own righteousness to us as a free gift. But our acceptance of that righteousness will certainly be evidenced by a life marked by that righteousness. I am encouraged that not all is bad. I am ever grateful that there are still some righteous, God-honoring politicians and some public servants who are **TRUE** servants. We must pray for and support them. There is still a core of leaders in America who aren't sold out to the applause and approval of men. There are still men and women of integrity. I am encouraged that there are still young men and women who give up the comforts of America to take the Good News of Jesus around the world. I am also encouraged to see that there are yet radical believers, who love Jesus with **ALL** their hearts and will have nothing to do with a different or compromised Gospel. My prayer is that our living and our preaching be marked by the righteousness, justice, and mercy embodied by Christ Himself. Ultimately, the hope of America is **NOT** found in the White House or the State House, nor in the Courthouse. The **HOPE OF AMERICA** is found in **GOD'S HOUSE**, and your house, and my house!