

“When Will God Deal with Injustice?”

Micah 2

Social injustice is a major issue today. There are many types of social injustice but the basic meaning of social injustice is when equal parties are treated unequally. The reason why social injustice occurs is because one person or one group has or perceives to have an advantage over another and uses that advantage to hurt someone for their own benefit.

This is nothing new. It's been around as long as sin has been around – in other words since Adam and Eve. The book of Micah confronts the social injustice in his day that was happening between fellow Israelites. Last week in Ch. 1 Micah spoke the Word from God that said judgment is coming to the both the northern kingdom and southern kingdom of Israel in the way of a forced one way trip to Assyria (modern day northern Iraq and Iran) or Babylon (modern day Iraq). We weren't told why in Ch. 1 but now we start getting details in Ch.2. The main issue in Micah's day, most likely under the evil king Ahaz, was that the advantaged were stealing land from fellow Israelites probably by lending money at unrealistic interest rates so that when they couldn't pay it back they foreclosed on the property and took it. To understand why this was so detestable in God's eyes we need to have a biblical theology of land, Israel's land.

God promised Abraham in Gen. 12:1-3 that He would bless Abraham with numerous descendants and give them their own land, the land of Canaan. That was finally realized when after Moses led the Israelites out of Egyptian bondage and brought them east of the Jordan, Joshua took over, crossed the Jordan via miracle, defeated Jericho via miracle, then split up and they conquered a lot (not all) of the land of Canaan. In the most exciting part of Joshua, Ch.'s 15-19 Joshua divides the inheritance of the land among the 12 tribes. When God gave the Law to Moses, He said in Lev. 25 that every 50 years Israel was to celebrate the year of Jubilee. And at the 50th year, held on the Day of Atonement, when all debts are wiped clean, anyone who sold their land would get it back. Let's read Lev. 25:23-28,

²³ “*The land must not be sold permanently, because the land is mine and you are but aliens and my tenants.* ²⁴ *Throughout the country that you hold as a possession, you must provide for the redemption of the land.*

²⁵ “*If one of your countrymen becomes poor and sells some of his property, his nearest relative is to come and redeem what his countryman has sold.* ²⁶ *If, however, a man has no one to redeem it for him but he himself prospers and acquires sufficient means to redeem it,* ²⁷ *he is to determine the value for the years since he sold it and refund the balance to the man to whom he sold it; he can then go back to his own property.* ²⁸ *But if he does not acquire the means to repay him, what he sold will remain in the possession of the buyer until the Year of Jubilee. It will be returned in the Jubilee, and he can then go back to his property.*

And Micah, like most prophets, threatened exile from the land. That exile lasted 70 years. Why 70? At the end of 2 Chron. 36:21 we read about the destruction of Jerusalem,

²⁰ *He [Nebuchadnezzar] carried into exile to Babylon the remnant, who escaped from the sword, and they became servants to him and his successors until the kingdom of Persia came to power.* ²¹ *The land enjoyed its Sabbath rests; all the time of its desolation it rested, until the seventy years were completed in fulfillment of the word of the LORD spoken by Jeremiah.*

Most suggest each of the 70 years was a Jubilee that Israel failed to observe. That would mean they missed 350 Jubilee years. What happens when you go back 350 years from 586 BC? You get 935 BC. Did anything significant happen around that time? The Kingdom of Israel split into north and south in 931 BC. So the Jubilee was not celebrated for the next 350 years.

So you if you needed money, you could sell your land temporarily for an amount that would take into account how many years left until the next Jubilee but in the Jubilee year it returned to you. But because Israel didn't observe the Jubilee land was kept by the buyer. Now this gives us a context for Micah 2 and it begins,

*Woe to those who plan iniquity, to those who plot evil on their beds!
At morning's light they carry it out because it is in their power to do it. ² They covet fields and seize them, and houses, and take them. They defraud a man of his home, a fellowman of his inheritance.*

God sees this and responds in v.3,

³ Therefore, the LORD says: "I am planning disaster against this people, from which you cannot save yourselves. You will no longer walk proudly, for it will be a time of calamity. ⁴ In that day men will ridicule you; they will taunt you with this mournful song: 'We are utterly ruined; my people's possession is divided up. He takes it from me! He assigns our fields to traitors.' " ⁵ Therefore you will have no one in the assembly of the LORD to divide the land by lot.

If you noticed in v.1 the wicked "plan" iniquity while in v.3 God is "planning" disaster on those who plan for evil. Here's the encouragement for the victims of injustice and the warning to the perpetrators of injustice,

Trust God to Thwart Sinful Plans Against Us **(2:1-5)**

When a prophet speaking on God's behalf says "Woe", it should make us stop and go 'woe'! 'Woe' indicates judgment is coming and be prepared for the worse case scenario, death. It is the opposite of blessing. It is to be cursed. Woe to who?

To those who use their advantages to hurt others for personal gain (vv.1-2)

While it's tempting to just label these as rich, you only have to have a small advantage over another to be tempted to use it to your advantage. So, as Leviticus 25 said, if someone needed money they could temporarily mortgage their land to pay a debt or buy needed seed or food in case it was a bad crop. Those who plan iniquity thought of ways they could use the legal system of the day. That's what 'at morning's light' refers to. The elders sat at the gate at the start of the day to hear all legal issues before it became too hot. So these 'lenders' couldn't wait for court to open so they could present their case against their fellow Israelites who couldn't keep up payments according to the deadlines. And so once it was in their power to take them to court for failure to pay, they pounced on the opportunity. Whether the elders were dishonest or just carrying out the Law, we're not sure. But those with advantages were guilty of coveting land and homes that others had which they didn't need.

They may also have been guilty like Ahab and Jezebel, who coveted Naboth's vineyard in 1 Kings 21. At first Ahab offered to legitimately buy it, but when Naboth correctly said '*I will not give you the inheritance of my ancestors*' (21:4), Ahab whined to Jezebel who concocted a plan to have the

elders at a feast for Naboth, but then planted two scoundrels to lie and declare they heard Naboth curse God and King. That was all the elders needed to hear and they had Naboth stoned to death. So I think we can assume that some of these evil plotters used whatever advantage they had – financial, political, educational, illegal – to steal land from their fellow Israelites.

But, v.3 says God is planning too and He's planning disaster for those who live to hurt others with their advantages. So when you and I are being treated unjustly remember that those who use their advantages to hurt others for personal gain

Will eventually lose everything while God's people will eventually gain everything (vv.3-5)

This is the principle of 'lex talionis', the eye-for-an eye retaliation. God will repay those who use their monetary, political, educational, legal, racial advantage to hurt others for their own gain. God will humble them by taking their possessions away so that they who once walked tall and arrogant will bend over in humility because God will give it away to traitors – perhaps referring to other people who don't deserve it either. In other words they will be out-tricked because someone else will plot evil against them.

The thing with the exile was that all Israel lost. The righteous went into exile as well. But Jeremiah told the Israelites going to Babylon in Jer. 29, that if they live just lives and seek to improve the community they live in (instead of just complaining) that God will bless them even in exile. And once they were all in exile, the wealthy lost their advantage. God levelled the playing field.

This is not an easy thing to trust God for because the justice we desire may never happen in our lifetime. Many Israelites never saw the promised land again. If we only look for justice this side of heaven we will be disappointed. The world is a sinful place and injustices happen all the time. Innocent people get thrown in jail. The rich use their power and influence to evade the law. So we may have to wait for the final 'exile' when life here ends and God levels the playing field. The unsaved lose all their advantages and end up reaping the consequences of their sin in pain and torment forever. While we who trusted Christ and accepted persecution will now experience the rewards promised by God and peace and happiness and rest forever. Which is exactly the way Jesus described it when He gave us a glimpse into eternity in Luke 16 at the end of the life of beggar Lazarus and the rich man at whose gate Lazarus begged most of his life. When the rich man called out to Abraham across the uncrossable chasm for some relief to his pain Abraham responded in 16:25

'Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony.'

"In your lifetime". Justice didn't happen until death. That may not be what we want to hear but we have to believe what Paul says in Romans 8:21 that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glories that will be revealed in us.

In Micah 2:5 Micah hints at this future reality when he says of the unjust,

" Therefore you will have no one in the assembly of the LORD to divide the land by lot.

There's a future day for saved Israelites when they get back all their land (read the new divisions in Ezek. 47-48) and only the righteous receive lots. The unjust lose what they had.

So how was Micah's message received? Obviously some didn't appreciate it. Whenever God sent His true prophets there always seemed to be false prophets hanging around spreading their lies, claiming they had the truth from God. So this is what we read about in vv.6-11. The false prophets counter Micah's message with,

⁶ *"Do not prophesy," their prophets say. "Do not prophesy about these things; disgrace will not overtake us."*

7

⁷ *Should it be said, O house of Jacob: "Is the Spirit of the LORD angry? Does he do such things?"*

And the people who hear both messages need to decide whose telling the truth. We must

Understand that False Teaching Will Always Confuse Many **(2:6-11)**

Do people want to hear "Judgment is coming if you don't repent", or "God won't harm you, He's too loving to do that." While we prefer the latter, its not true. Actually this is one of the signs you know it's a false message,

False teachers claim God never judges (vv.6-7)

Jeremiah was hounded by the false teachers. Every time he declared the truth, someone came along and said 'He's just lying. God said 'All is well. No judgment is coming'. God tells us how to discern truth from error in Deut. 18. He told Moses,

²¹ *You may say to yourselves, "How can we know when a message has not been spoken by the LORD?" ²² If what a prophet proclaims in the name of the LORD does not take place or come true, that is a message the LORD has not spoken. That prophet has spoken presumptuously, so do not be alarmed.*

The true prophet will predict something will happen and it will whereas the false prophet will predict something will happen and it won't or he'll predict what God says is wrong but when it happens he is proved false. Look at what Micah says people wanted to hear then (as many do now) as if it was from God:

¹¹ *If a liar and deceiver comes and says, 'I will prophesy for you plenty of wine and beer,' he would be just the prophet for this people!*

In other words, false teachers

Falsely claim God promises prosperity (v.11)

Wine and beer imply good times! Lots of food, drink because everyone is prospering. That's the kind of message people want to hear that everything is fine which means God is happy and we can continue to live the life we want. But when you reach a message like that and life doesn't go that way, you are misleading a lot of people away and they are not prepared for eternity. One can't fathom the judgment that is waiting for the people who lie about God and deceive others about their need for the gospel. And because

They who rob others of the truth, will never find the truth (vv.7-10)

“Do not my words do good to him whose ways are upright?

⁸ *Lately my people have risen up like an enemy. You strip off the rich robe from those who pass by without a care, like men returning from battle.*

⁹ *You drive the women of my people from their pleasant homes. You take away my blessing from their children forever.*

¹⁰ *Get up, go away! For this is not your resting place, because it is defiled, it is ruined, beyond all remedy.*

Those who live on ill-gotten goods never fully get to enjoy them. They will lose out on God’s inheritance of being in His presence forever because of their sinful behaviour. Micah compares them to shamelessly robbing your captives of their personal belongings as they march by to whatever it is you are going to enslave them to do.

The book of Micah, however, contains pockets of hope. And here’s the first one in Ch. 2:12-13,

¹² *“I will surely gather all of you, O Jacob; I will surely bring together the remnant of Israel. I will bring them together like sheep in a pen, like a flock in its pasture; the place will throng with people.*

¹³ *One who breaks open the way will go up before them; they will break through the gate and go out. Their king will pass through before them, the LORD at their head.”*

Be Assured God’s King is Coming **(2:12-13)**

God will spare a remnant of Israelites, who will turn to Him when the Messiah, the King returns. God uses shepherding language to describe how He’s going to look after His people. The exile wont last forever. Injustice wont last forever because the King of Glory will right all the wrongs.

It’s too easy to believe we don’t act unjustly but let’s be careful that we don’t use our own advantages to belittle others.

You only have to have a little more money than someone else,
a little more knowledge than someone else,
be a little more older than someone else,
or even a little more spiritually mature.

There are times when we have used our advantage to steal someone else’s joy or made someone feel inferior in some way, by bullying them intellectually or emotionally. Let’s be careful. God sees all injustice and will deal with ours too. Let’s listen to the Word of God, as some did in Micah’s day. We know some repented because of what Jeremiah said about 75 years later.

Jer. 26:18 *“Micah of Moresheth prophesied in the days of Hezekiah king of Judah. He told all the people of Judah, ‘This is what the LORD Almighty says:*

*“Zion will be plowed like a field,
Jerusalem will become a heap of rubble,
the temple hill a mound overgrown with thickets.’*

¹⁹ "Did Hezekiah king of Judah or anyone else in Judah put him to death? Did not Hezekiah fear the LORD and seek his favor? And did not the LORD relent, so that he did not bring the disaster he pronounced against them? We are about to bring a terrible disaster on ourselves!"

Thankfully Hezekiah and others listened to the warnings of Micah and Isaiah and escaped an Assyrian invasion. Let's pray that we all heed the warnings the Spirit spoke to us about and change our heart and actions.

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