

CHAPTER 3

What the apostle says of another of the prophets is true of this, who was also his contemporary — “Esaias is very bold,” ~~610~~Romans 10:20. So, in this chapter, Micah is very bold in reproving and threatening the great men that were the ringleaders in sin; and he gives the reason (v. 8) why he was so bold, because he had commission and instruction from God to say what he said, and was carried out in it by a higher spirit and power than his own. Magistracy and ministry are two great ordinances of God, for good to his church, but these were both corrupted and the intentions of them perverted; and upon those that abused them, and so abused the church with them, the prophet is very severe, and justly so.

I. He gives them their lesson severally, reproving and threatening princes (v. 1-4) and false flattering prophets (v. 5-7).

II. He gives them their lesson jointly, putting them together, as acting in conjunction for the ruin of the kingdom, which they should see the ruins of (v. 9-12).

~~300~~ MICAH 3:1-7

THE CRIMES OF THE PRINCES AND PROPHETS

Princes and prophets, when they faithfully discharge the duty of their office, are to be highly honoured above other men; but when they betray their trust, and act contrary to it, they should hear of their faults as well as others, and shall be made to know that there is a God above them, to whom they are accountable; at his bar the prophet here, in his name, arraigns them.

I. Let the princes hear their charge and their doom. The *heads of Jacob*, and the *princes of the house of Israel*, are called upon to *hear* what the prophet has to say to them, v. 1. The word of God has reproofs for the greatest of men, which the ministers of that word ought to apply as there is occasion. The prophet here has comfort in the reflection upon it, that, whatever the success was, he had faithfully discharged his trust: *And I said, Hear, O princes!* He had the testimony of his conscience for him that he had not shrunk from his duty for fear of the face of men. He tells them,

1. What was expected from them: *Is it not for you to know judgment?* He means to *do* judgment, for otherwise the knowledge of it is of no avail. “Is it not your business to administer justice impartially, and not to *know faces*” (as the Hebrew phrase for partiality and respect of persons is), “but to *know judgment*, and the merits of every cause?” Or it may be taken for granted that the heads and rulers are well acquainted with the rules of justice, whatever others are; for they have those means of knowledge, and have not those excuses for ignorance, which some others have, that are poor and foolish (~~210~~ Jeremiah 5:4); and, if so, their transgression of the laws of justice is the more provoking to God, for they sin against knowledge. “Is it not for you to know judgment? Yes, it is; therefore stand still, and hear your own judgment, and judge if it be not right, whether any thing can be objected against it.”

2. How wretchedly they had transgressed the rules of judgment, though they knew what they were. Their principle and disposition are bad: They *hate the good and love the evil*; they hate good in others, and hate it should have any influence on themselves; they hate to do good, hate to have any good done, and hate those that are good and do good; and they *love the evil*, delight in mischief. This being their principle, their practice is according to it; they are very cruel and severe towards those that are under their power, and whoever lies at their mercy will find that they have none. They barbarously devour those whom they should protect, and, as unfaithful shepherds, fleece the flock they should feed; nay, instead of feeding it, they feed upon it, ~~250~~ Ezekiel 34:2. It is fit indeed that he who feeds a flock should *eat of the milk of the flock* (~~400~~ 1 Corinthians 9:7), but that will not content them: They *eat the flesh of my people*. It is fit that they should be clothed with the wool, but that will not serve: They *flay the skin from off them*, v. 3. By imposing heavier taxes upon them than they can bear, and exacting them with rigour, by mulcts, and fines, and corporal punishments, for pretended crimes, they ruined the estates and families of their subjects, took away from some their lives, from others their livelihoods, and were to their subjects as beasts of prey, rather than shepherds. “They *break their bones* to come at the marrow, and *chop the flesh in pieces as for the pot*.” This intimates that they were,

(1.) Very ravenous and greedy for themselves, indulging themselves in luxury and sensuality.

(2.) Very barbarous and cruel to those that were under them, not caring whom they beggared, so they could but enrich themselves; such evil is the love of money the root of.

3. How they might expect that God should deal with them, since they had been thus cruel to his subjects. The rule is fixed, Those shall have judgment without mercy that have shown no mercy (v. 4): “*They shall cry to the Lord, but he will not hear them*, in the day of their distress, as the poor cried to them in the day of their prosperity and they would not hear them.” There will come a time when the most proud and scornful sinners will *cry to the Lord*, and sue for that mercy which they once neither valued nor copied out. But it will then be in vain; God will even hide his face from them at that time, that time when they need his favour, and see themselves undone without it. At another time they would have turned their back upon him; but at that time he will turn his back upon them, *as they have behaved themselves ill in their doings*. Note, Men cannot expect to do ill and fare well, but may expect to find, as Adoni-bezek did, that done to them which they did to others; for *he is righteous who takes vengeance. With the froward God will show himself froward*, and he often gives up cruel and unmerciful men into the hands of those who are cruel and unmerciful to them, as they themselves have formerly been to others. This agrees with ⁴²¹³Proverbs 21:13, *Whoso stoppeth his ears at the cry of the poor, he shall cry himself and shall not be heard*; but the merciful have reason to hope that they shall obtain mercy.

II. Let the prophets hear their charge too, and their doom; they were such as prophesied falsely, and the princes bore rule by their means. Observe,

1. What was their sin.

(1.) They made it their business to flatter and deceive the people: *They make my people err*, lead them into mistakes, both concerning what they should do and concerning what God would do with them. It is ill with a people when their leaders cause them to err, and those draw them out of the way that should guide them and go before them in it. “They make them to err by crying peace, by telling them that they do well, and that all shall be well with them; whereas they are in the paths of sin, and within a step of ruin. They *cry peace*, but they *bite with their teeth*,” which perhaps is meant of their biting their own lips, as we are apt to do when we would suppress something which we are ready to speak. When they cried *peace*

their own hearts gave them the lie, and they were just ready to eat their own words and to contradict themselves, but they bit with their teeth, and kept it in. They were not blind leaders of the blind, for they saw the ditch before them, and yet led their followers into it.

(2.) They made it all their aim to glut themselves, and serve their own belly, as the seducers in St. Paul's time (^{<516B>}Romans 16:18), for *their god is their belly*, ^{<518B>}Philippians 3:19. They *bite with their teeth, and cry peace*; that is, they will flatter and compliment those that will feed them with good bits, will give them something to eat; but as for those that *put not into their mouths*, that are not continually cramming them, they look upon them as their enemies; to them they do not *cry peace*, as they do to those whom they look upon as their benefactors, but they *even prepare war against them*; against them they denounce the judgments of God, but as they are to them, as the crafty priests of the church of Rome, in some places, make their image either to smile or frown upon the offerer according as his offering is. Justly is it insisted on as a necessary qualification of a minister (^{<518B>}1 Timothy 3:3, and again ^{<516E>}Titus 1:7) that he be not *greedy of filthy lucre*.

2. What is the sentence passed upon them for this sin, v. 6, 7. It is threatened,

(1.) That they shall be involved in troubles and miseries with those to whom they had cried peace: *Night shall be upon them*, a dark cold night of calamity, such as they, in their flattery, led the people to hope would never come. *It shall be dark unto you*, darker to you than to others; *the sun shall go down over the prophets*, shall go down at noon; all comfort shall depart from them, and they shall be deprived of all hope of it. *The day shall be dark over them*, in which they promised themselves light. Nor shall they be surrounded with outward troubles only, but their mind shall be full of confusion, and they shall be brought to their wits' end; their heads shall be clouded, and their own thoughts shall trouble them; and that is trouble enough. They kept others in the dark, and now God will bring them into the dark.

(2.) That thereby they shall be silenced, and all their pretensions to prophecy for ever shamed. They never had any true vision; and now, the event disproving their predictions of peace, it shall be made to appear that they never had any, that there never was an answer of God to them, but it was all a sham, and they were cheats and impostors. Their reputation

being thus quite sunk, their confidence would of course fail them. And, their spirits being ruffled and confused, their invention would fail them too; and by reason of this darkness, both without and within too, *they shall not divine*, they shall not have so much as a counterfeit vision to produce, they shall be *ashamed*, and *confounded*, and *cover their lips*, as men that are quite baffled and have nothing to say for themselves. Note, Those who deceive others are but preparing confusion for their own faces.

☞ MICAH 3:8-12

THE CRIMES OF THE PRINCES AND PROPHETS

Here,

I. The prophet experiences a divine power going along with him in his work, and he makes a solemn profession and protestation of it, as that which would justify him, and bear him out, in his plain dealing with the princes and rulers. He would not, he durst not, make thus bold with the great men, but that he was carried out to do it by a prophetic impulse and impression. It was not he that said it, but God by him, and he could not but speak the word that God put into his mouth. It comes in likewise by way of opposition to the false prophets, who were full of shame when they lived to see themselves proved liars, and who never had courage to deal faithfully with the people, but flattered them in their sins; they were *sensual, not having the Spirit*, but truly (says Micah) *I am full of power by the Spirit of the Lord*, v. 8. Having in himself an assurance of the truth of what he said, he said it with assurance. Compare him with those false prophets, and you will say, There is no comparison between them. *What is the chaff to the wheat?* ~~2038~~ Jeremiah 23:28. What is painted fire to real fire? Observe here,

1. What the qualifications were with which this prophet was endured: He was *full of power, and of judgment, and of might*; he had an ardent love to God and to the souls of men, a deep concern for his glory and their salvation, and a flaming zeal against sin. He had likewise courage to reprove it and witness against it, not fearing the wrath either of great men or of great multitudes; whatever difficulties or discouragements he met with, they did not deter him nor drive him from his work; *none of these things moved him*. And all this was guided by judgment and discretion; he

was a man of wisdom as well as courage; in all his preaching there was light as well as heat, and a spirit of wisdom as well as of zeal. Thus was this man of God *thoroughly furnished* for every good word he had to say, and every good work he had to do. Those he preached to could not but perceive him to be full both of *power* and *judgment*, for they found both their *understandings opened* and their *hearts made to burn within them*, with such evidence and demonstration, and with such power, did the word come from him.

2. Whence he had these qualifications, not from and of himself, but he was *full of power by the Spirit of the Lord*. Knowing that it was indeed the *Spirit of the Lord* that was in him, and spoke by him, that it was a divine revelation that he delivered, he spoke it boldly, and as one having authority, *set his face as a flint*, knowing he should be justified and borne out in what he said, ²⁸¹Isaiah 50:7, 8. Note, Those who act honestly may act boldly; and those who are sure that they have a commission from God need not be afraid of opposition from men. Nay, he had not only a Spirit of prophecy, which was the ground of his boldness, but the Spirit of sanctification endued him with the boldness and wisdom which were requisite for him. It was not in any strength of his own that he was strong; *for who is sufficient for these things?* but in *the Lord, and in the power of his might*; for *from him all our sufficiency* is. Are we full of power at any time, for that which is good? It is purely by *the Spirit of the Lord*, for of ourselves we are weak as water; it is the God of Israel that gives strength and power both to his people and to his ministers.

3. What use he made of these qualifications — this judgment and this power; he *declared to Jacob his transgression and to Israel his sin*. If transgression be found in Jacob and Israel, they must be told of it, and it is the business of God's prophets to tell them of it, to *cry aloud and not to spare*, ²⁸²Isaiah 58:1. Those who come to hear the word of God must be willing to be told of their faults, and must not only give their ministers leave to deal plainly and faithfully with them, but take it kindly, and be thankful; but, since few have meekness enough to receive reproof, those have need of a great deal of boldness who are to give reproofs, and must pray for a spirit both of wisdom and might.

II. The prophet exerts this power in dealing with the *heads of the house of Jacob*, both the princes and the prophets, whom he had drawn up a high charge against in the former part of the chapter. He repeats the summons

of their attendance and attention (v. 9), the same that we had v. 1, directing himself to *the princes of the house of Israel*, yet he means those of *Judah*; for it appears (~~2188~~ Jeremiah 26:18, 19, where v. 12 is quoted) that this was spoken in Hezekiah's kingdom; but, the ten tribes being gone into captivity, Judah is all that is now left of Jacob and Israel. The prophet speaks respectfully to them (*hear, I pray you*) and gives them their titles of *heads* and *princes*. Ministers must be faithful to great men in reproofing them for their sins, but they must not be rude and uncivil to them. Now observe here,

1. The great wickedness that these heads of the house of Jacob were guilty of, *princes, priest, and prophets*; in short, they were covetous and prostituted their offices to their love of money.

(1.) *The princes abhorred all judgment*; they would not be governed by any of its laws, either in their own practice or in passing sentence upon appeals made to them; they *perverted all equity*, and scorned to be under the direction or correction of justice, when it could not be made pliable to their secular interests. When, under pretence of doing right, they did the most palpable wrongs, then they perverted equity, and made it serve a purpose contrary to the intention of the founder of magistracy and fountain of power. It is laid to their charge (v. 10) that *they build up Zion with blood*. “They pretend, in justification of their extortion and oppressions, that they build up Zion and Jerusalem; they add new streets and squares to the holy cities, and adorn them; they establish and advance the public interests both in church and state, and think that therein they do God and Israel good service. But it is *with blood* and *with iniquity*, and therefore it cannot prosper; nor will their intentions of good to the city of God justify their contradictions to the law of God.” Those mistake who think that a burning zeal for holy church, and the propagating of the faith, will serve to consecrate robberies and murders, massacres and depredations; no, Zion's walls owe those no thanks that build them up with blood and iniquity. The sin of man works not the righteousness of God. “The office of the princes is to judge upon appeals made to them; but *they judge for reward* (v. 11); they give judgment on the side of those that give the bribe; the most righteous cause shall not be carried without a fee, and for a fee the most unrighteous cause shall be carried.” Miserable is the people's case when the judge's enquiry upon a cause is not, “What is to be done in it?” but, “What is to be got by it?”

(2.) The priests' work was to teach the people, and for that the law had provided them a very honourable comfortable maintenance; but that will not content them, they *teach for hire* over and above, and will be hired to teach any thing, as an oracle of God, which they know will please and gain them an interest.

(3.) The prophets, it should seem, had honorary fees given them by way of gratuity (~~1~~ 1 Samuel 9:7, 8); but these prophets governed themselves in their prophesying by the prospect of temporal advantage and that was the main thing they had in their eye: They *divine for money*. Their tongues were mercenary; they would either prophesy or let it alone, according as they found it most for their advantage; and a man might have what oracle he would from them if he would but pay them for it. Thus they were fit successors of Balaam, who *loved the wages of unrighteousness*. Note, Though that which is wicked can never be consecrated by a zeal for the church, yet that which is sacred may be, and often is, desecrated, by the love of the world. When men do that which in itself is good, but do it for filthy lucre, it loses its excellency, and becomes an abomination both to God and man.

2. Their vain presumption and carnal confidence, notwithstanding: They *lean upon the Lord*, and because they are, in profession, his people, they think there is neither harm nor danger in these their wicked practices. Faith builds upon the Lord, rests in him, and relies upon him, as the soul's foundation; presumption only *leans upon the Lord* as a prop, makes use of him to serve a turn, while still the world is the foundation that is built upon. They speak with a great deal of confidence,

(1.) Of their honour: “*Is not the Lord among us? Have we not the tokens of his presence with us, his temple, his ark, his lively oracles?*” They are *haughty because of the holy mountain* and its dignities (~~3~~ Zephaniah 3:11), as if their church-privileges would palliate the worst of practices, or as if God's presence with them were intended to make the priests and people rich with the sale of their performances. It was true that the Lord was among them by his ordinances, and this puffed them up with pride; but, if they imagined that he was among them by his favour and love, they were mistaken: but it is a cheat the children of men often put upon themselves to think they have God with them, when they have by their sin provoked him to depart from them.

(2.) They are confident of their own safety: *No evil can come upon us.* Many are rocked asleep; in a fatal security by their church-privileges, as if those would protect them in sin, and shelter them from punishment, which are really, and will be, the greatest aggravations both of their sin and of their punishment. If men's having the Lord among them will not restrain them from doing evil, it can never secure them from suffering evil for so doing; and it is very absurd for sinners to think that their impudence will be their impunity.

3. The doom passed upon them for their real wickedness, notwithstanding their imaginary protection (v. 12): *Therefore shall Zion for your sake be ploughed as a field.* This is that passage which is quoted as a bold word spoken by Micah (~~2038~~ Jeremiah 26:18), which yet Hezekiah and his princes took well, though in another reign it might have gone near to cost him his head; nay, they repented and reformed, and so the execution of this threatening was prevented, and did not come in those days.

(1.) It is the ruin of holy places that is here foretold, places that had been highly honoured with the tokens of God's presence and the performances of his worship; it is Zion that shall be ploughed as a field, the building burnt to the ground and levelled with it. Some observe that this was literally fulfilled in the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans, when the ground on which the city stood was ploughed up in token of its utter desolation, and that no city should be built upon that ground without the emperor's leave. Even *Jerusalem*, the holy city, shall *become heaps of ruins*, and the *mountain of the house*, on which the temple is built, shall be overgrown with briars and thorns, *as the high places of the forest.* If sacred places be polluted by sin, they must expect to be wasted and ruined by the judgments of God.

(2.) It is the wickedness of those who preside in them that brings the ruin: "It is *for your sake* that *Zion shall be ploughed as a field*; you pretend to build up Zion, but, doing it by blood and iniquity, you pull it down." Note, The sin of priests and princes is often the ruin of states and churches. *Delirant reges, plectuntur Achivi — The kings act foolishly and the people suffer for it.*