

Micah 3:1

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And I said, Hear, I pray you, O heads of Jacob, and ye princes of the house of Israel; Is it not for you to know judgment?

Analysis

And I said, Hear, I pray you, O heads of Jacob, and ye princes of the house of Israel; Is it not for you to know judgment? Micah directly confronts corrupt leadership with a devastating rhetorical question. The phrase **רָאִשֵׁי יַעֲקֹב** (roshei Ya'akov, "heads of Jacob") and **קִצִּינֵי בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל** (qetziney beit-Yisrael, "rulers of the house of Israel") addresses those with judicial and administrative authority. These leaders held positions requiring wisdom and justice (Exodus 18:21-22; Deuteronomy 1:13-17).

The question **הֲלוֹא לָכֶם לְדַעַת אֶת־הַמִּשְׁפָּט** (halo lakhem lada'at et-hamishpat, "Is it not for you to know judgment?") is bitterly ironic. **מִשְׁפָּט** (mishpat) means judgment, justice, or righteous legal decision. These leaders should be experts in justice—it's their job description! The verb **יָדַע** (yada', "to know") implies intimate, experiential knowledge, not mere intellectual awareness. They should know justice so deeply it governs every decision.

Yet verses 2-3 reveal the shocking reality: they hate good and love evil, treating people like meat to be butchered. The question exposes their fundamental failure—those charged with administering justice have become its worst violators. This echoes Isaiah's condemnation: "Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil" (Isaiah 5:20). When guardians of justice become perpetrators of injustice, society collapses into predatory chaos.

Historical Context

Micah prophesied during the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah (740-700 BC) when Judah's leadership class exploited the poor. The Mosaic law established clear standards for judges: impartiality, rejection of bribes, protection of vulnerable (Exodus 23:1-9; Deuteronomy 16:18-20, 24:17-22). But by Micah's era, these protections were systematically violated. Judges took bribes (Micah 3:11), rulers seized property (2:1-2), and religious leaders prophesied for profit (3:5-7). Amos and Isaiah contemporaneously denounced similar corruption (Amos 5:10-15; Isaiah 1:21-23). This corruption contributed to Judah's eventual exile—God judges nations that institutionalize injustice.

Related Passages

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Study Questions

1. How does leadership that hates good and loves evil corrupt an entire society?
2. What does it mean to truly 'know' justice—not merely intellectually but experientially and practically?
3. How should Christians respond when those charged with upholding justice become its chief violators?

Interlinear Text

וְאָמַרְתִּי	שְׁמָעוּ	נָא	רָאשֵׁי י	יַעֲקֹב ב	וְקִצְיָיִם י
And I said	Hear	H4994	I pray you O heads	of Jacob	and ye princes
H559	H8085		H7218	H3290	H7101
בֵּית	יִשְׂרָאֵל ל	הֵל וְא	לָכֶם	לֹד עַת	אֵת
of the house	of Israel	H3808	H0	Is it not for you to know	H853
H1004	H3478			H3045	
הַמִּשְׁפָּט:					
judgment					
H4941					

Additional Cross-References

Isaiah 1:10 (Parallel theme): Hear the word of the LORD, ye rulers of Sodom; give ear unto the law of our God, ye people of Gomorrah.

Hosea 5:1 (Judgment): Hear ye this, O priests; and hearken, ye house of Israel; and give ye ear, O house of the king; for judgment is toward you, because ye have been a snare on Mizpah, and a net spread upon Tabor.