

WHY OUR CIVILIZATION IS COLLAPSING

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TEXT: Micah 3 Key Verse: Verse 12

"Therefore shall Zion for your sake be plowed as a field, and Jerusalem shall become heaps, and the mountain of the house as the high places of the forest."

INTRODUCTION: When Senator Robert F. Kennedy was assassinated, the President of the United States assured us that America was not a sick nation. He then appointed a ten man commission to find out what's wrong in America. That's treating the symptoms but denying the illness.

As you study the history of every civilization and nation, you will find three unalterable characteristics. The first one is: every nation, no matter how pure its conception, has always gone corrupt. Second characteristic: When this spiritual decay sets in, the majority of the people are unaware of it. And, those who are aware of it, are indifferent to it. Third characteristic: The causes for the collapse of every nation have been similar. The same forces that worked the downfall of the Roman Empire are responsible for the downfall of present day empires.

Our text is a message from God through Micah to Israel. Israel's conception as a nation was the purest, its beginning the holiest of all the peoples of the earth. It produced the most ethical religion ever known to man. And yet no other nation fell so low. If it can happen to Israel it can happen to anyone. I challenge you to read history - to study the fall and rise of nations, and you will discover that no nation has ever gone the way America is going and survived.

Acts chapter 17 verse 26 says "And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation." This verse means that God fore-ordained the rise and fall of nations: He determines the boundaries of their existence. God is sovereign over the nations of the earth. He defeated the Spanish Armada with the wind, Napoleon in Russia with the snowflakes, and saved England at Dunkirk with a fog. All nations are in the hands of God, and I repeat: No nation has ever gone the way America is going and survived.

America is in a sense a modern Israel. Her conception was pure, her beginning magnificent. A more glorious page has never been written in the history of nations. Likewise, America has been the fertile soil for the greatest religious revival in modern history; Christianity has blossomed and spread around the world from America. With the exception of Israel, no other country has ever been elevated to such towering heights - and no country has ever plummeted to such low depths. And the tragedy is, most of us are unaware of it. And those of us who are aware of it, are indifferent to it. Read your history, study the Word of God, and you will see the same forces that caused Rome to fall, and Greece, and Israel, are the same forces operating in our country.

Micah is preaching at a crisis time in Israel and he mentions three groups of people who are responsible for the coming destruction of their country. Verse 12: "Therefore shall Zion for your sake be plowed as a field, and Jerusalem shall become heaps, and the mountain of the house as the high places of the forest." (because of you).

I. POLLUTED POLITICIANS

Notice in verse 1, Micah addresses his message to the "heads of Jacob" and the "princes". Again in verses 9 and 11 he speaks to the leaders of the nation.

An emergency had arisen in Israel. The Assyrians were threatening and doom was imminent. The leaders knew they could not withstand the onslaught of the Assyrian army and so they called for a summit conference. All the leaders got together and began trying to find a way out. I don't know how Micah got there - I doubt if they invited him. He must have crashed the party. But God's prophet had a chance to speak. After Senator Kennedy was assassinated, the TV featured psychologists, sociologists, politicians, and newsmen, trying to analyze the situation and offer a solution. But I watched in vain for a prophet of God to appear on one of those panel shows saying "Thus saith the Lord".

When Micah gets a chance to speak to the leaders he begins at the top! When God saves a nation he always starts at the top. When you clean out a fishpond you start at the top, because the dead fish always rise to the top. And when a country goes sour it starts at the top and dribbles down to the bottom. Micah told the leaders that the Assyrians were not their enemy. He laid the blame for the decline and destruction at their own feet. You are the cause of this, he said, you are the real enemy of this country.

God always begins at the top. When Israel fell into abominable idolatry and God sought to save them, He sent Elijah. And to whom did Elijah go first? He started at the top, he went to King Ahab, and Ahab met him in the way. Ahab did what a lot of people are doing today: blame the church for everything that has gone wrong. Ahab said, "Elijah, you have caused all this trouble, you have brought all these things upon us." Elijah pointed his finger at Ahab and said, "You are the one who is troubling Israel!" And while our political leaders are meeting in conference rooms trying to find out what is wrong with this country, we need another Elijah or another Nathan to stand before the king, and cry out, "thou art the man!" When God sought to bring about revival under King Hezekiah He started with King Hezekiah. And the revival in Nineveh started when the king repented in sackcloth and ashes.

You understand, I am not talking politics: I am not talking about Democrats or Republicans. I don't think any party has the real answer - not the Democratic party, nor the Republican party, nor the cocktail party. I am not talking just about the president or the governor - I am talking about the leaders of our nation, our state, our city, and our community.

Did you know that in Romans 13:1 God calls the political leaders his ministers? The word "minister" is the Greek word for deacon. The president is God's deacon, and the governor is God's deacon, and the mayor is God's deacon. They are primarily God's servants, and as such are primarily responsible to God.

But here is the tragedy: In verse 3 of Micah 3 the prophet says that the leaders are shepherds who instead of defending the sheep, devour them. And this seems to be the place we have come to in our country. They have thrown the Bible out of the schools and left it in the motels. They handcuff the policemen and let the criminals go free. The Supreme Court can't come to a satisfactory decision concerning pornographic literature in the mails but they have no difficulty in ruling on prayer in schools.

You ask, "why is it so necessary for the leaders of our country to be spiritually and morally right with God?" For this reason: any decision made outside the will of God is a dangerous one.

When Ahab and Jehosaphat were counseling together whether or not to go to war against Assyria, Jehosaphat insisted on calling in the prophet of God to see what the Lord would have them to do. Would to God we had leaders who before launching into war, would seek the counsel of Almighty God. During this election year we will have a lot of people running for everything and standing for nothing. And some of them who are running ought to be hiding, and if what they say about each other is true, some of them ought to be in jail.

In 1867 the British historian, McCauley, made this statement in writing to a friend in America. "Your republic will be fearfully ravaged and laid waste in the 20th century, as was the Roman Empire in the 5th century with this difference - that the Huns and Vandals who ravaged the Roman Empire in the 5th century came from without, your Huns and Vandals will be engendered from within your own country and by your own institutions."

What can I as a Christian do about all this? First, BE INTOLERANT. There is the sin of an individual and there is the sin of society, and the sin of society is worse. For example, the sin of Jimmy Hoffa is terrible, but the sin of society is greater for allowing such a condition to exist. Have you noticed that when God brought destruction to Israel, he brought it upon everybody, not just the corrupt leaders? The same doom that comes to the leaders of our country will come to those who tolerate such corrupt conditions.

We have become too tolerant. We don't care about the moral and spiritual purity of the man running - all we want to know is, can he raise wages and lower taxes, can he put more money in our pockets. R. G. Lee said that you could take an old smelly white goat, tie a bottle of whiskey to his tail, and write democrat across him, and a lot of people would vote for him. Let the liquor and gambling crowd promise to save us a dollar in taxes and lots of so-called Christians will vote their way! Patrick Henry gained fame by saying, "Give me liberty or give me death." The 20th century American has shortened that statement to just plain, "girmie".

Not long ago in Dallas a Baptist church answered a plea to help a needy family in their neighborhood. The family was living on welfare; things were so bad, the church was told, that the baby had to sleep in a cardboard box. When several from the church visited the home, they found it to be true. The baby was sleeping in a cardboard box - the box in which the color TV had been delivered.

Second, we ought to PRAY for our leaders. In I Timothy chapter 2, verses 1 and 2, "I exhort therefore, that first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; for kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty."

First Peter chapter 2 verse 17 says, "Honour the king." Do you know who that king was? He was the Roman emperor who at that very time was persecuting the church; he was their dreaded enemy. Yet, Peter said, "Honour the king."

If we were as quick to pray for our leaders as we are to criticize them, our country might not be in the mess it's in today. Beginning with this pastor first and all the way down to the youngest member of this church, we need to confess our sin of not praying for our national leaders. It's just as wrong not to pray for these leaders as it is not to pray for lost souls - the same Bible that commands one commands the other.

They tell me, I don't know if it is true, that there is a member of our church who no longer attends because I don't preach against Communism. Listen, when Micah stood before the people of Israel he didn't blame the Assyrians for the crisis, he blamed the individuals within that nation. And the greatest danger our country is facing is not the Communists - its the citizens who have forsaken the true and living God. If America dies, it will not be homicide, it will be suicide.

II. PACIFYING PREACHERS

In verse 5 Micah turns to the preachers and says, "Thus saith the Lord concerning the prophets that make my people err, that bite with their teeth, and cry, Peace; and he that putteth not into their mouths, they even prepare war against him." The Assyrians are camped around Jerusalem, their swords are sharpened and drawn, they are ready to fight. And the preacher not wanting to alarm anybody constantly cries, "Peace, peace. There is nothing to worry about." But God says, "You are leading my people astray."

Much of the spiritual decay and moral perversion in our country, must be laid at the feet of American preachers. There was a time when the pulpit was our nation's conscience, but today it is largely ignored. At best, many pulpits are merely supplements to the Sunday newspaper. The American pulpit has become a mockery: preachers openly from their pulpit condone extra-marital sex, churches abandoning the gospel of Jesus Christ and in its place scheduling dances that are supposed to interpret an "Adult Only" movie. God deliver us from that kind of religion.

A pastor friend has been looking for a music and youth director. His committee has visited dozens of Baptist churches and they have come back disgusted. Disgusted, not at the men they were interviewing but at the preaching they had to listen to. This pastor said, that in all the churches his committee visited they did not hear one biblical sermon.

What were the preachers doing in Micah's day that brought about the denunciation of God? The very same thing preachers are doing in our day: preaching what the people want to hear.

There is a very marvelous story in I Kings 22. Godless Ahab went to visit King Jehosaphat and he said, "It's been three years since we have had a war - we can't let this go on. We've got to have a war. Let's go up to Ramoth-gilead. We can defeat them."

Jehosaphat, that godly king, said "inquire at the word of the Lord first." And so Ahab called in his 400 preachers and they all said that the Lord would be with them if they went to battle against Ramoth-gilead. You know, people can tell when preachers are phonies. Jehosaphat turned to Ahab and said, "Is there one prophet of the Lord in this place?" And Ahab said, "Well, there is one, but I hate him. He never says anything good about me." And Jehosaphat asked that he be called to give his advice. When the messenger went to seek out the prophet of the Lord his name was Micaiah, he said, "Micaiah, you have been chosen to preach the convention sermon. I want you to go in there and make a good impression. You talk as one that likes the king, you say good things to the king."

And so Micaiah went in and told Jehosaphat that the Lord would be with them if they went up to battle against Ramoth-gilead. When Jehosaphat heard that he got angry and told Micaiah to tell the truth. And Micaiah said, "I saw all Israel scattered upon the hills, as sheep that have not a shepherd." And when the

prophet said that Ahab turned to Jehosaphat and said, "didn't I tell you that he wouldn't say anything good about me." God give us preachers like Micaiah who will not preach what the people want to hear but what they need to hear.

III. PRESUMPTUOUS PEOPLE

Verse 11 says "The heads thereof judge for reward, and the priests thereof teach for hire, and the prophets thereof divine for money: yet will they lean upon the Lord, and say, Is not the Lord among us? none evil can come upon us." The third destructive force in that society as in ours is a presumptuous people. All of this corruption and pollution permeating the country and yet the people leaned upon the Lord and said, "Is not the Lord among us? None evil can happen to us. Micah, you talk about all this corruption and this immorality, why the Lord is with us. We are trusting in God, we believe in God." Look, its on our half dollars, In God We Trust. We say it in our pledge of allegiance to the flag, One nation under God. "God is with us, none evil can come upon us. Nothing can happen to us." We are a presumptuous people, presuming upon God's blessings. As long as we call ourselves a Christian nation we think we can live as we please and God will turn a blind eye and deaf ear to our sin. But He will not. Go to Greece, go to Rome, go to Germany, talk to the ashes of their leaders and their people and if those ashes could preach, they would preach of divine retribution and judgment upon presumptuous people.

The very thing that brought about the downfall of Israel was the rank and file of the citizens were living in open ungodliness and immorality, then going to the temple on the Lord's Day and performing their religious ceremonies, thinking that this hour spent in God's house would obliterate all the evil they had done the week before. The greatest tragedy in our country is that there is no consistency with the way we live during the week and what we profess on Sunday when we come to church. Someone said, "Well, God's on our side." God doesn't take sides, God takes over! And God is not obligated to deliver any nation that forsakes His law and rejects His standard of holiness.

Several years ago there was in Chicago a group of policemen who become bandits. They would go out and rob a store, then return to their hiding places, put on their uniforms, and investigate their own crime. In Jeremiah chapter 7, God says that this is what we do. He says that during the week we commit adultery, we lie, we steal, we bear false witness against our neighbor, and then we come to the temple of the Lord and say, "The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, we are delivered." And He says, you have made the house of God a den of thieves. He said the house of God has become a hideout because through the week His people are living like the devil and then return to church thinking that by going through the religious ceremony the Lord will overlook and excuse everything they have done. The church has become a hideout for multitudes of Baptists and other Christians, who during the week are living Christless, godless lives and then think because they come to church on Sunday morning, God is going to overlook it all. He will not do it.

If Israel would have confessed and repented of its sin, God would have delivered it; but it turned blind eyes to its own sin and said nothing can happen to us, the Lord is with us.

One night, years ago, Daniel Webster, the great Christian statesman, was having dinner with 20 of his friends at the Astor House in New York City. One of his friends asked him this question, "Mr. Webster, what is the most important thought that has ever occupied your mind?" Daniel Webster passed his hand over

his forehead and spoke in a very loud voice, "The most important thought that has ever occupied my mind is my individual responsibility towards God."

Has that thought every occupied your mind - your individual responsibility towards God? How many of us are guilty of this presumptuous piety - how many of us this last week have played the hypocrite, not praying until we came into church, not reading our Bible until we got in Sunday School, not mentioning the name of Jesus until we came to worship?

There are enough Christians, enough Baptists in America, to turn the tide and change the direction of our country's destiny. And if we can do it God will hold us responsible if we dnn't do it.

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