



## BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Micah 2:6-11

“Promise-Box Religion”

TRANSCRIPT

[Prayer] Father, we thank Thee for the privilege of the study of the word again. We rejoice in the privilege of studying Micah and coming to know the prophet and his times better. We thank Thee for his courage, for his wisdom, for his skill, for his insight particularly. And we thank Thee that these great principles with which he himself wrestled and which he sought to bring to Israel's attention are principles that have a very close relevance to our lives today. Enable us to understand and enable us to profit from the things that he says in this portion of his prophecy. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

[Message] One of the newest commentators on the Book of Micah is Leslie Allen. He is a professor in the London Bible College in London, a very well-known evangelical scholar, and has written a commentary in the New International Commentary Series: a commentary on the Hebrew text of the Book of Micah, very skillfully done. Leslie Allen is an evangelical and in the midst of his commentary, which is a fine technical commentary, there are lots of interesting little comments that he makes. And one of the things that he says in his exposition of this section is that "Promise-box religion is a snare in every age."

Probably we who are in the United States are not used to the expression "Promise-box religion," and perhaps it requires a word of explanation for us Americans,

but what he means by that is those who have a religion of thoughts and ideas and promises from the Bible but who do not really in their lives carry out the things that they say that they believe. In other words, it's almost entirely an intellectual kind of thing and does not have any practical relevance to their daily lives.

Well, if that is what Professor Allen believes, it is certainly true that promise-box religion is a snare in every age. That's one of the great emphases of the Bible incidentally, done in different ways of course, because the prophets don't talk about promise-box religion and the apostles don't talk about it. But they do talk about what he meant by that. And in that respect the prophets and the apostles and the other authors of Scripture are at one.

Spelled out, what Professor Allen is talking about and what Micah is talking about is that our creed, that is that which we believe, must issue in an appropriate conduct. Or put in another way as some evangelists and Bible teachers have, our life must issue in a corresponding lip or our talk must be followed by a corresponding walk. In other words the things that we say, the things we say we believe, the things that we affirm, our theological views are things that one ought to find in his life as well.

Guy King wrote a book which I have in my library on the Book of James. James, you know, is the one who says that "Faith without works is dead." Mr. King entitled his book "A Belief That Behaves." I've always thought that was very appropriate. I've referred to it several times here at Believers Chapel. Why that's the kind of thing that Micah is speaking about and that's what Mr. Allen was speaking about when he said that promise-box religion is a snare in every age. That is the kind of thing to which we hold when we say we believe this, but if you look at a person's life, there is no evidence at all of the (What shall we say?) incorporation of those truths, the incarnation of those truths in the life of the individual.

This truth I say is not the province of Micah alone. It's the universal coin of the spiritual marketplace. Jeremiah in chapter 23 of his prophecy speaks about the same

thing. Our Lord talks about it. He says, “By their works you shall know them.” The Apostle Paul in Titus chapter 3 and verse 8, in I think one of Paul’s greatest statements, makes the same point. Listen to Titus chapter 3 and verse 8. I think it’s beautifully put.

The apostle says, “This is a trustworthy statement; and concerning these things I want you to speak confidently, so that those who have believed in God may be careful to engage in good deeds. These things are good and profitable for men.”

The apostle makes it plain that our salvation rests upon the fact that we have believed. He doesn’t say, he never says, that a person gets to heaven by doing things of course. But he does insist that those who say that they have believed do good works. And in fact, he exhorts those who have believed here to engage in good deeds. It’s belief that justifies us, but the belief that justifies us and brings us new life will issue in a new kind of life expressed in the things that we do. And therefore, the Lord can say, “By their fruits you shall know them.” And Paul can say that we who have believed have to be careful to engage in good deeds.

Now it’s important to notice the tenses. He says, “They who have believed engage in good works.” So faith saves, but the faith that saves issues in good works. That’s what James meant when he said, “Faith without works is dead, being alone.”

The reformers put it another way. They put it very simply by saying this, “Faith alone justifies, but not the faith that is alone.” In other words, true genuine faith will produce good works.

Now, you or I may not see them. I could never say for example, Tom Reye is sitting down here in the first row of those of you who are here, and he may say to me for example that he has believed in Christ and is trusting him for his salvation. And I may look at his life and I may never see anything in his life that demonstrates that he is truly a Christian. I see some things that indicate that he’s a great rooter for the University of Alabama. But so far as the things that have to do with spiritual things I might, because I’m a human being, I might not see any evidence of life that is there. But that would not

mean that he was not saved. God knows those things. The Scriptures say that it will be there. The evidence will be there and God will of course know that it is there.

Incidentally, I have seen one or two things in Tom's life that indicate that he's saved. He's one of our deacons in case some of you don't know him. But the apostles then unite in the expression of the fact that those who say that they have believed should manifest that in the kind of life that they live.

John the apostle in his epistle does the same thing. In 1 John chapter 1 in verse 6, in 1 John chapter 2 in verse 10, in 1 John chapter 3, verse 16 through verse 18, he talks about these things. He says in verse 6 of chapter 1, "If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth."

In chapter 2, verse 10 he says, "The one who loves his brother abides in the light and there is no cause for stumbling in him. But the one who hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going because the darkness has blinded his eyes."

In chapter 3, verse 16 the apostle writes,  
  
"We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoever has the world's goods, and beholds his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him? Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and in truth."

So the apostles and the prophets and our Lord all unite in saying promise-box religion, the kind of religion in which we affirm that we believe certain things but these things are not active powers in our lives, is a snare in every age.

Well, we turn now to Micah and we'll notice that this is one of the things that Micah puts his finger upon so far as the children of Israel are concerned in his day. The structure of this paragraph is very clear. You'll notice in verse 6 he begins with a

reference to the prophets, " 'Do not speak out,' so they speak out." And then in verse 11, "If a man walking after wind and falsehood has told lies and said, 'I will speak out to you concerning wine and liquor,' he would be a spokesman to this people." So in verse 6 he speaks about the false prophets; in verse 11 he speaks about the false prophets.

So you can tell that the beginning of this section has to do with the false prophets. The end of the section has to do with the false prophets. And then in the middle, in verses 8, 9 and 10, there is an accusation of bad behavior on the part of those who follow the false prophets and a verdict of condemnation upon them.

So we have then a reference to the prophets in the beginning, then an accusation and condemnation of the followers of the false prophets, and finally again in verse 11 another reference to the false prophets. And in between he also has used a particular word twice in order to ironically again show that the things that people do are likely to be the things that God will do with them if they are not truly genuine in their following of him. We'll try to point that out as we go through the section.

Now I would like to apologize for the Book of Micah in one respect. This section that we're looking at is a very difficult section to translate in the Hebrew text. Not only is it difficult for ordinary readers of Hebrew, but it's difficult for scholars. And in fact, in the scholarly commentaries on this particular text, you will find that several different translations have been given of a number of these lines in the prophecy. And I'll try to point out two or three of them. But I'm going to read from the New American Standard Bible, not because I think that in every case it is correct, but it is a reliable translation and many of you have it before it you. And so we'll keep that before us, but here and there I may make a comment concerning other renderings which may be correct.

Now Micah starts out by speaking about the creed of the false prophets. Remember, he's very much concerned about the spiritual condition of the southern kingdom. He realizes that there has been an apostasy in the land and people have moved away from the truth that they held to much more firmly in the earlier days. The

Assyrians are to the north and they are coming down towards Judah and Samaria. Samaria has not yet been taken captive, or if they have, it's shortly after that, and so Judah, the home ground of Micah, is in serious difficulties and their difficulties the prophet relates to the fact that they have not really paid attention to the promises of God.

Now of course they have all of the trappings of religion. If you had been there, you would have observed the priests carrying out a most impressive ritual. The Levitical ritual is probably some of the most beautiful ritual ever devised by men. If you had been there on the Day of Atonement, you would have marveled at the ritual, the beauty of the ritual of the Day of Atonement. And if you remember, too, that they were carrying out their sacrifices every day. And then on the feast days, they carried out certain liturgies that were significant from the standpoint of pointing forward to the time of Christ. What we're talking about is a people that have the religion because it was given to them by God. And they professed to believe it, but they have departed from it in their heart. And for them it is largely a matter of form and ritual.

Does that have any application to us today? Well, we're not, of course, responsible to carry out the Levitical ritual, but we have our own little practices that we carry out. And in all of our professing Christian churches there will be those kinds. Some of us have more ritual than others. Some of us don't have any ritual, and the fact that we don't has become kind of a ritual for us too. So this is something that is endemic to human nature. We tend to grow cold and indifferent to the things of the Lord. When we were in school, you know we'd say, How many of you believe that? I think everybody in this room would probably raise your hand, because you have felt that in your own spiritual life.

Now here comes Micah in the midst of a situation like that, and Micah is not supported by the hierarchy. See, the king in Israel doesn't support him. He's not on a pension. He's not on a salary. He actually is just a servant of the Lord. And he is a person who believes, well as he says in the 3rd chapter and the 5th verse, "Thus says the

Lord concerning the prophets who lead my people astray; When they have something to bite with their teeth. (You can see a person taking a gold coin and biting it.) When they have something to bite with their teeth, they cry, 'Peace,' But against him who puts nothing in their mouths they declare holy war." In other words, they are favorable to those who pay them.

In verse 8 he says, "On the other hand I am filled with power-- With the Spirit of the LORD-- And with justice and courage To make known to Jacob his rebellious act, Even to Israel his sin." So here is an individual who comes in the midst of the nation, one of them, a prophet of God, not supported by anybody and not answerable to anybody but to the Lord God. And he begins to say, If things don't change in Judah and in Samaria, judgment is going to come upon us.

Well, you can imagine what the false prophets would think about that, and that's what he's talking about here. You can see the adverse reaction to Micah's condemnatory preaching, and of course, it's predictable. Any time that a man comes in the midst of a situation where everybody is enjoying things in what they call peace and safety, and he begins to tell them that judgment is soon to come upon them, why you can expect some adverse reaction.

It reminds me of the words of Isaiah in chapter 30 in verse 10 of his prophecy where we read (And I want to look this up and read it), the prophet says in chapter 30 and verse 10 of his prophecy, "Who say to the seers, 'You must not see visions'; And to the prophets, 'You must not prophesy to us what is right, Speak to us pleasant words (on love, sex and marriage), prophesy illusions' (not the sovereignty of the grace of God or things like that).

You can see, of course, the kinds of things that the prophets had to contend with. They had to contend with people who didn't like what they were saying and they were saying, Give us the good things. Give us the nice things, the things which we can endure.

Amos, in Amos' prophecy he has quite a struggle with the chief priest, because the chief priest was one who was supported by the king. In chapter 7 in verse 10 through verse 13 of Amos' prophecy, he writes about it. And let's listen to Amos' words. He said, "Thus He showed me, and behold, the Lord was standing by a vertical wall with a plumb line in His hand." I'm sorry I'm reading verse 7; I should have read verse 10.

"Then Amaziah, the priest of Bethel, sent word to Jeroboam king of Israel, saying, "Amos has conspired against you in the midst of the house of Israel; the land is unable to endure all his words. For thus Amos says, 'Jeroboam will die by the sword and Israel will certainly go from its land into exile.'" Then Amaziah said to Amos, "Go, you seer, flee away to the land of Judah and there eat bread and there do your prophesying! But no longer prophesy at Bethel, for it is a sanctuary of the king and a royal residence." "

So here is the conflict between prophetic faith and the established religion with its vested interests. And the chief priest, being supported by the king, was very upset by the things that Amos was saying. So when Micah quotes the words of the false prophets here, we're not surprised. Listen, verse 6, " 'Do not speak out,' so they speak out. 'But if they do not speak out concerning these things, Reproaches will not be turned back.' "

Now that's not an easy statement. The first part of it is relatively easy. "Do not speak out." Now if you have a New American Standard Bible, you'll notice that that is in quotations. This is what the false prophets were saying: 'Don't speak out.' Micah says, "So they speak out." In other words, Micah reports the ban on his preaching.

But notice, too, one other thing. That imperative, "Do not speak out," is in the plural. So Micah had some other people who supported him. He was not absolutely alone. We know from this that he had others who were with him.



Now we know there were some other prophets at the time. He prophesied the same time that Hosea did, for example. So this evidently was the general kind of thing that people said about the prophets. " 'Don't speak out,' so they speak out."

The word for "speak out" is a very interesting word. You know, it means really literally to drip. It suggests our ranting or perhaps our drivel. And see, a person is speaking and he's so caught up in his ecstasy that his mouth begins to drip a bit, and you can see they were making fun of the prophets. 'Do not drip', so they drip, he says. I like Micah. He evidently was accused of having some of the frenzy of prophetic ecstasy.

Now the next line is not easy, "But if they do not drip out or speak out concerning these things, Reproaches will not be turned back."

Now you can take this statement in two ways. You can take the first they, that is the they of the second line, "But if they do not speak out concerning these things," you can take that they as a reference to the bad, false prophets and then translate it something like this: "But they should not speak out concerning these things." In other words, Micah would be saying: They shouldn't tell us not to speak. That's possible.

But it's also possible to take it to mean, "If we don't speak out, then the reproaches will not be turned back." In other words, if we don't speak out, then we're going to have more and more difficulty. So they say, don't speak out; but Micah says, if we don't speak out then the reproaches will not be turned back. I rather like that, and I think that's probably what is meant, but the other is a possibility.

Now when he says here, "Reproaches will not be turned back," that can be taken in two ways too. That can be taken as words spoken by the false prophets and translated: Humiliation will not overwhelm us. Don't tell us that these things are going to happen to us. They're not going to happen to us. And furthermore the things that you say are going to happen, they're not going to overtake us. Disgrace will not overtake us. Humiliation will not overcome us.

I think that perhaps what they are saying, if that is correct, is that all of your prophesying, Micah, is not relevant to us. You see, what you're saying has to do with people who are not covenantally related to the Lord God, but we're covenantally related to the Lord God. And if we are covenantally related to the Lord God, then of course we can count upon him to care for us no matter what kind of thing is carried on in the land.

Now, in the 7th verse, we read, "Is it being said, O house of Jacob: 'Is the Spirit of the LORD impatient? Are these His doings?' Do not My words do good To the one walking uprightly?"

And again, these are the false prophets, probably that are speaking, and they are saying, "Is it being said, O house of Jacob: 'Is the Spirit of the LORD impatient? Are these His doings?' Do not my words do good To the one walking uprightly?" So what they are doing is they are wrapping themselves in the cloak of their covenant relationship, and they are saying, our covenantal heritage, expressed by the way in the expression in verse 7 "house of Jacob." Their covenantal heritage enables them to stand unthreatened in their false optimism. So in other words, when Micah points out the practical failings that exist in the land and how they are not walking uprightly and how violence and other things that are wrong are being carried on in the land, they are saying, We are the Lord's people, therefore reproach will not overwhelm us. Does the Bible say that the Lord God is impatient with his people? "Do not his words do good to the one who walks uprightly," and surely we're the ones walking uprightly because we're the Lord's people.

And then Micah continues in that 7th verse by saying, "Do not my words do good to the one walking uprightly?" That may mean keep company with one who keeps his word or benefit the one who walks uprightly. In other words, they're saying then, the upright one can be trusted to keep his promises.

What a plausible answer with its half-truths. It is true that when the saints of God trust in the covenant-keeping God, they will be preserved, and they will stay in the center of the will of God and they may expect his blessing.

But if we think that because we have been related to the Lord God by covenant that we can do anything that we please, if we think that we, because we have believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, for example, may constantly do unrighteousness, may constantly turn aside from the Lord, may be indifferent to the word of God, may have no concern and compassion whatsoever for those who are outside of Christ, if we think that being related to the Lord God by covenant grace is compatible with a total indifference to the things of God, and wickedness and violence characterize our ways, then we have not understood the word of God aright. That's a comfortable kind of doctrine. That's a word for the wrong people at the wrong time. It's fine to encourage people by the fact that when we hold to the promises of God, we have a God who is a covenant keeping God and he does keep his promises. But he also says in his word that he blesses those who are true to his word.

In other words, as John says, We know that we've been born again because we love the brethren. We know that we've been born again when we do righteousness. Or the Lord Jesus says, "By their fruits you shall know them."

In the biblical teaching, the God of covenant grace who because of his relationship to them secures them and holds them is not incompatible with the strongest kinds of exhortation to righteousness and holiness of life. Many people make that mistake. It's often made in evangelical churches. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved."

And so we believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, we think, and we've been saved. And then we can pretty well live like we please. No, we don't say that, but often our lives indicate that. There's no love for the Scriptures, no concern for growth in grace, no time of prayer, no concern for others, no concern for the church of Jesus Christ, no concern for the sick, no concern for the lost. Those are the inevitable signs of unreality in our lives.

So when Micah speaks here and puts words into the mouths of these individuals, he is trying to say these people have a false hope. They have their doctrine half right.

It's plausible. It sounds good, but it's comfortable teaching. What they did was to pick and choose amid the truths of the word of God. It's so easy to do that, so easy to rejoice in certain promises and run rapidly over the admonitions and the warnings which are addressed to all of us who read the word of God.

When I was growing up in Charleston South Carolina, there was a certain denomination that was rather predominant in the city, and I was, my relatives and many of my friends were, part of that particular denomination. It was a denomination noted for its liturgy but at the same time it was noted also for its laxity. And my friends used to say to me, I was Presbyterian and of course I didn't know what the Presbyterians believed. They said, they told me, You're a Presbyterian so you believe in predestination. And I said, Wonder what that means?

And we had a lot of fun among ourselves, not any of us really knew anything at all about the Lord, but we knew all of these terms. And occasionally they would say to me, Well, I like to be what I am because my church lets me live like I want to. That was a recommendation for their church.

Well, that's what Micah's speaking about. He's talking about that same attitude that looks at the word of God and picks the things out of the word of God that we like, passes by the other things as if they are not really there.

I can see why Micah was unpopular. I can see why they told him to shut up, stop your driveling. I can see why they said that to Amos. I can see why they said that to Isaiah. Tell us the pleasant things. Tell us the good things. Don't tell us those other things because they're unpleasant.

Now Micah turns to the conduct of the patrons of the false prophets and he says that the conduct of the patrons of the false prophets proves the kind of doctrine that they're being taught. Listen to what he says now in verse 8, verse 9 and verse 10.

Incidentally, you will notice that he begins with the religious ideology of his rivals, those false prophets, and then he turns to the practical results of the teaching of the false

prophets because Micah knows, just as every student of the Bible knows, that what you believe affects what you do.

We do the things that we do because we believe certain things. There are exceptions when we fall into sin, like Peter fell into sin; he didn't believe that. He went out and wept bitterly when it was brought home to his conscience. But generally speaking, we do the things that characterize our beliefs. And we can tell what a person believes by what he does.

\_\_\_\_\_ And so, Micah has told us now about these false prophets and what they believe. And so he says, I want to show you that what they believe is wrong by just looking at their patrons, that is, the people that follow them. Look at the kind of lives that they live; that'll tell you what kind of doctrine they've been taught.

\_\_\_\_\_ That's a real word for the hour too. First of all, he has an accusation in verse 8 and verse 9. “Recently,” this is a New American Standard Bible, in the Hebrew text, it's simply, “And yesterday.” He means right up to the present time.

“Recently My people have arisen as an enemy—(Now here he talks about what they have done.) You strip the robe off a fellow Israelite From unsuspecting passers-by, from those returned from war. The women of my people you evict, Each one from her pleasant house From her children you take my splendor forever.”

So what kind of misconduct characterized those who listen to the false teachers?

Well, “Recently my people have arisen as an enemy.” Now what he means by that “my people have arisen as an enemy” is he means that in the people of Israel themselves there has been the imbibing of this false teaching and the result is that they now are enemies of the Lord God.

Incidentally, when he says, "Recently my people have arisen as an enemy," he means that their conduct is such that in my sight, that is in the Lord's sight, they are no

longer his people. "My people have arisen as an enemy." Do you remember in the New Testament when the Apostle Paul in Romans chapter 9 says, "Not all who are of Israel are Israel."?

Now he's talking about the fact that in the nation some were elect and some were non-elect. But you could turn it around the other way and say, In Israel you could find those who were faithful to the word of God, the remnant, and you could find those who were unfaithful, looking at it from the human standpoint. So here, "My people recently have arisen as an enemy." They've been listening to the false teaching of the false prophets, and they've been believing the things that they've said, and the result has been that Israel has now become an enemy of God.

What are they doing to prove that they're an enemy of God? Well, they're stripping the robe off a fellow Israelite. They're stealing their garments. They're holding up people.

You know, one of the customs in Israel was this: that if a person was in bad straits and needed to borrow some money, he could borrow it by mortgaging his clothes. There's a passage in the Book of Exodus in which it is stated that if an Israelite is in bad straits and he wants some money, he may make an arrangement with a fellow Israelite to borrow money on the basis of his cloak, his robe. But at night the individual must return it to him in order that he not be cold at night. That's set forth in the Bible. Now you can see that evidently something like that may have been happening. They were stripping the robe off of individuals who were in bad straits and they were keeping it.

Furthermore, there were unsuspecting passers-by who came by and they just frankly fell upon them and stole their clothes. And he refers to men who have returned from war and advantage was taken of them.

Sometimes that takes place in the twentieth century. We know from our world wars that we've had, some of the difficulties that our soldiers have had when they've come back after serving the country after World War I and after World War II and after

the Viet Nam War. So you can understand how something like that might well have happened then. It's in the nature of men to take advantage of anyone who cannot take care of themselves.

Furthermore, "The women of my people you evict." So evidently the women were evicted from their homes, "Each one from her pleasant home." They probably were widows because they are singled out and the home is said to belong to them. Ordinarily the homes would belong to a family, and the man would be the one referred to. But since the women are referred to here, it's likely, most of commentators agree, that the women referred to here are widows. So they are evicted from their homes. Anybody who's ever seen a John Wayne movie knows about that.

And then he goes on to say, "From her children you take my splendor forever." Vassar had had an interesting economic situation. It would be a nice one for the United States of America. I don't know that they ever had any kind of inflation in Israel. And they certainly didn't have any "bracket creep." And the result was not that their taxes were going up constantly. You don't see that so far as I can tell from the Old Testament.

Now, they had a very strange economic system in fact. At the end of fifty years, everybody got all of their property back just as the Lord had given it to them in the beginning. But that meant that a certain family had a certain plot of land forever.

Now remember, in Israel no land ever really belonged to anyone. Remember when we were expounding the first few verses of Micah; the land belongs to the Lord. The Israelites were simply trustees who were holding the land for the Lord. But when he says here in verse 9, "From her children you take my splendor forever," he's referring to the fact that those people were oppressing children who had inherited property and they couldn't hold it and it was being taken from them contrary to the Law of Moses.

Now isn't that striking? Here are men who are saying, God's with us. We're the children of Israel. We're the covenantal people. These things that Micah, the prophet, is saying to us are not going to come true. They're not going to come true because we're

the covenant people. God has given us the Scriptures. He made the covenant with Abraham and with Isaac and Jacob. We are his people. These things are not going to happen to us.

But at the same time they're saying that, they're breaking the Law of Moses. They're breaking the covenantal law while at the same time they're saying, We are the recipients of covenantal grace from Jehovah.

Do you think that's possible today? You think it's possible for a person in a Christian church to affirm his great confidence in the covenantal grace of God and yet at the same time be violating scripture? Oh, how true it is.

Sunday morning in this congregation, you can look out over the congregation; the elders I know can do this. You can look out over the congregation and you can see illustration after illustration of this. I think of one woman who comes in here almost every Sunday morning with two young boys: one now, a real tall good-looking young man, another one who's growing up as well. I can remember the husband when he spoke about the sovereign grace of God and how he affirmed his belief in the doctrines of Calvinism. But he's abandoned his wife and children.

At the same time that we affirm that we believe the word of God, believe the doctrines of the grace of God, at the same time we violate the word of God. Yes, it happens, it happens right in Believers Chapel. It happens in other churches too. It happens in many churches. And some of our Christian churches, professing Christian churches, it's characteristic of them. Micah is no old fashioned prophet. Micah is a prophet for today. Micah is a prophet for us.

"From her children you take my splendor forever." That expression incidentally, I know you're probably puzzled over it, but "my splendor forever" is an expression that is used of the land of Palestine, the land of Canaan. And so what he means is, "From her children you take my land, my beautiful land of Canaan which I have given to them, you've taken it for yourself."



Now these are the followers of the false prophets, Micah says. Well that'll tell you a whole lot about the doctrine of the false prophets, wont' it? Micah would have said. You know it must have taken a lot of courage for Micah to get up in society like this and say the things that he has said.

Now in the 10th verse, I like this 10th verse, and I like one thing about Micah. He has the keenest sense of parody. He loves to describe the activities of the disobedient sinners and then use the very terms that he has used in describing them to describe what God is going to do to them. And very often the very thing that they have been doing to others is the thing that God is going to do to them. Just like Haman who erected those gallows in order to hang Mordecai and found out to his misfortune that by the providence of God they were made for him.

Now in verse 8, he said, "Recently my people have arisen as an enemy." In other words there has been a movement among my people of turning away from the word of God and now they have risen up as an enemy. They have become enemies of me.

Alright they have arisen and they have become enemies. And so in verse 10, he says, "Arise and go," and that's the same word in the Hebrew text, the word *quwm*. 'So they have risen up as an enemy of me,' Jehovah says, 'OK, my judgment, my verdict upon them is that they're going to arise and go into captivity.'

"Arise and go, for this is no place of rest because of the uncleanness that brings on destruction, a painful destruction." So those who evict others from their property, the widows and the children, they are going to be given marching orders by the Lord God and they're going to be evicted from the land of Canaan. Assyria is going to come in and it's going to take them out into captivity.

And I'm sure, I cannot prove this of course, but I'm just sure that if we knew everything about the background of this, we'd probably find that some of these terms were the very terms that these influential men in Judah used when they spoke to their bailiffs and said I want you to go out to Widow So-and-so and I want you to get her off of

that land, because I now have control of it. Or I want you to go out and to take that land away from that young man over there. I just have an idea that these are the very words that those men used. And God now uses it of them and says that Canaan is no longer a place of rest for you. You're going to be scattered out in the Assyrian empire. You are unfit for Canaan.

And finally in verse 11 Micah rubs it in a bit with a caricature of his rivals. He flings out a job description of a prophet who could get a job in Judah in his day. And listen to it: "If a man walking after wind and falsehood had told lies and said, I will speak out to you concerning wine and liquor, he would be a spokesman to this people." In other words the kind of man who could get a job prophesying in Israel today would be the kind of man who would prophesy to you: 'It's alright for you to have whiskey and liquor galore.'

I like the way he describes these preachers. This is their job description. They've got to, in a sense, try to please the people. He lampoons them really. He says they walk after wind and falsehood. Literally that word wind in Hebrew, just as in Greek, is a term that means both wind and spirit. It's possible it means wind. On the other hand, most of the commentators feel it probably means spirit here. And so it's an illusion to the ecstatic spirit possession that the false prophets claim to have.

You remember particularly in 1 Kings chapter 18 and verse 22 or so where we have the great conflict between Elijah and the prophets of Baal. And the prophets of Baal are described there in these words. I'll just read a few verses,

"Elijah came near to the people and said, "How long will you hesitate between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him." But the people didn't answer him a word. Then Elijah said to the people, "I alone am left a prophet of the LORD, but Baal's prophets are 450 men. Now let them give us two oxen; and let them choose one ox for themselves and cut it up, and place it on the wood, but put no fire

under it; and I will prepare the other ox and lay it on the wood, and I will not put a fire under it. Then you call on the name of your god, and I will call on the name of the LORD, and the God who answers by fire, He is God." And all the people said, "That's a good idea. (I wonder if that's exactly what they said; that's the way this is translated here, "That's a good idea.") So Elijah said to the prophets of Baal, "Choose one ox for yourselves and prepare it first for you are many, and call on the name of your god, but put no fire under it." Then they took the ox which was given them and they prepared it and called on the name of Baal from morning until noon saying, "O Baal, answer us." But there was no voice and no one answered. And they leaped about the altar which they made. (In other words, they acted as if they were filled with the spirit and called upon their god. I like what Elijah did.) It came to pass about noon, Elijah began to mock them; (I'd like to have heard everything that he said.) he said, "Call out with a loud voice, he's a god; either he is occupied or he's gone outside, or he's on a journey, perhaps he is asleep and needs to be awakened." (you can just see all of the things.) So they cried with a loud voice and then they cut themselves according to their custom with swords and lances until the blood gushed out. And it came about when midday was past, that they raved until the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice; but there was no voice, no one answered, and no one paid attention."

They raved on through the rest of the day. That's what Micah is talking about here when he says, "If a man walking after the spirit and falsehood has told lies and said, 'I will speak out to you concerning wine and liquor.'" That's the kind of spokesman who can get the job for prophet in Judah and Israel today. Easy-going, Antinomian promise-box religion is the kind of thing that will get the job.

And that's the kind of thing today that will get the job. The person who will get the job is the one who can fit in with the authorities, who will preach the things that are pleasing to them. I like the way Micah closes this. He says, "He would be a spokesman."

(By the way, that word spokesman is the same word translated up in verse 6, "Do not speak out,' so they speak out. But if they do not speak." It's the word that means to drip, driveler, a raver, a ranter, a dripper. You can almost say, If a man walking after the spirit and falsehood has told lies and said I will speak out to you concerning wine and liquor, he would be the dripper for this people. He'll be the driveler. That's what you accuse me of, but that's the kind of person that you would you have. You see, people love a man who preaches the kind of God that they choose to believe. That's the kind of dropper that they want, so Micah says.

Well, I must say Micah is some prophet. I admire the courage of him. I admire the fact that this man can go in the midst of people who are, of course, very much interested in doing whatever they can to shut him up, but nevertheless goes right into the heart of his own land and preaches the truth of God.

But don't forget the major point that he makes. It's possible for us to say that we believe a whole lot about the word of God but if our actions are not in harmony, if they are not consonant with it, then to put it in the words of Micah, we are in deep trouble. In fact, we are rising up against the Lord God that we affirmed that we have believed in. May God help us to be true to our confession of faith in our lives.

Let's bow in a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful to Thee for the words of the prophet Micah. They have such great relevance to us. Lord, deliver us from the façades, from the superficialities, from the inconsistencies that often characterize us. We praise Thee for the covenant grace Thou hast shown to us in the Lord Jesus Christ but help us remember that we do have responsibility by Thy wonderful grace. Work so mightily within that we are pleasing to Thee we pray. If confession for sin is needed, oh God, give us the grace to confess and give us the grace to walk differently. For Jesus' sake. Amen.