

MICAH CHAPTER 3RELIGIOUS BUT NOT RIGHT

Is it possible to be religious but not right? Is it possible to do religious things but not have our heart right before God?

Can a person pray and not have his heart right? Can a person read the Bible and not have his heart right? Can a person go to church and not have his heart right? Can a person sing a hymn and not have his heart right? Can a person quote a Bible verse and not have his heart right? Being religious (performing a ritual) without heart and head is not a proper response before God. If a person has a heart problem, being religious is not going to solve it. Only God can solve heart problems! Religious acts and words do not set a person free from the terrible prison house of sin. Who is the only One who can set us free (John 8:36)? _____

In Matthew 7:21-23 the Lord Jesus described some people who were RELIGIOUS but not RIGHT. How do verses 21-22 show that these people were religious? How do verses 21 and 23 show that these people were not right? Religion does not fix problems. If people keep on practicing evil and not letting God fix their real problems (especially their heart problem), then this will only bring more and more problems and pressures and finally the punishment (judgment) of God. What does Matthew 7:23 tell us about the punishment of these people who were religious but not right?

The prophet Isaiah lived at the same time as the prophet Micah. The people that Isaiah preached to were the same people that Micah preached to. In Isaiah chapter 1 we can clearly see that the people were RELIGIOUS but NOT RIGHT. Can you find verses in Isaiah chapter 1 which show that these people were religious?

_____ Can you find verses in Isaiah chapter 1 which show that these people were not right? _____

What did these people need more than anything else (see Isaiah 1:16-18)? _____

In Old Testament times people would offer sacrifices (the Jewish people would sacrifice animals to the Lord). If a person's heart was right then this would be pleasing to the Lord. But for

many people, bringing sacrifices became just another religious thing to do and they would do it even if their heart was not right before God. Read Proverbs 15:8. Is God pleased with the sacrifice of the wicked? _____ What is God delighted with? _____

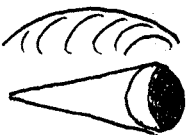
Proverbs 28:9 describes a person who does not listen to God's Word ("turns away his ear"). Is this person still religious? What religious thing does he do? _____ Is God pleased by it? _____

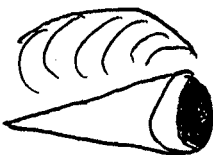
God is looking for a right HEART. God would rather have a RIGHT HEART and NO RITUAL than to have RITUAL and NO RIGHT HEART. It would be better not to bring any sacrifice at all than to bring a sacrifice when your heart is not right. Read Psalm 51:16-17. Which verse shows that God is not really looking for the outward ritual? _____ Which verse shows that God is looking for a RIGHT HEART? _____

Religious activity does not make a ^{bad} person good. Being religious does not solve a person's problems. God wants the heart to be right. There are many people who do not mind being religious, BUT THEY DO NOT WANT TO BE RIGHT!

Now we are ready to begin Micah Chapter 3. In this Chapter Micah points out the great sins of the people who were the leaders of the nation (the political leaders and the spiritual leaders).

Verse 1  → THE PRINCES
(leaders, rulers)

Verse 5  → THE PROPHETS
(those who were supposed to give God's Word)

Verses 9+11  → PRINCES (All the)
PRIESTS (Leaders)
PROPHETS

In verse 1 of Chapter 3 Micah speaks about the PRINCES (rulers, leaders). Verse 2 shows us that they had a very serious spiritual problem: "who _____ the good, and _____ the evil." They have this all backwards! They should have done the very opposite: "Abhor (hate) that which is _____; cleave to that which is _____" (Romans 12:9). What does the Lord Jesus Christ love (Hebrews 1:9)? _____ What does He hate (Hebrews 1:9)? _____ Read Psalm 97:10. Those who love the Lord should do what? _____ Did the people in Micah's day hate evil (Micah 3:2)? _____ Therefore did they love the Lord? _____

In the last chapter we learned how selfish these people were and how willing they were to oppress and harm other people as long as they could benefit and become richer and more powerful. Micah 3:2-3 describes this terrible oppression. They were destroying people (in the last chapter we saw that this included even women and children). Notice the strong language Micah uses to describe this. They were like wild beasts tearing their victims. As leaders of the people they should have been GOOD SHEPHERDS, but they were the worst shepherds any sheep could ever have. Instead of feeding the flock, they would fleece the flock (remove the fleece from the sheep which means to skin the animal alive!). Instead of feeding the flock they would feed upon the flock. They were wolves in shepherd's clothing. They were like a butcher cutting up meat for boiling! They were like a cannibal--doing what a cannibal would do to his victims at a feast! Does Proverbs 30:14 say the same thing? _____ See also Psalm 14:4.

The day is coming when these sinful rulers are going to be in trouble (verse 4). At that time they will call upon the Lord, but will God hear them and help them (verse 4)? _____ They showed no mercy to others and so God will show no mercy to them. God will do to them as they have done to others. Does Proverbs 1:28 teach the same thing as Micah 3:4? _____

In verse 5 Micah is talking about the prophets. Did these prophets make the people go God's way or did they make the people err (go the wrong way)? _____ To "bite with their teeth" means to have plenty to eat. We usually use our teeth the most when we are eating a big meal! This verse

shows how selfish these prophets were. They were saying, "If you pay me and feed me fine meals, then I will give you a message that you will like very much ("PEACE"--all will be well with you!), but if you do not feed me then you will be my enemy!" That would be like a policeman talking to a poor lady who has just been robbed and saying to her: "If you give me \$50.00 then I'll chase after that crook, but if not, then I'll arrest you!" These prophets were not serving God, they were serving themselves. Paul described such people in Philipians 3:19 ("whose God is their _____").

What is God going to do about these prophets? They are going to be in big trouble! We are told about this trouble in Micah 3:6-7. God is not going to speak or answer these people and they will be left in darkness! These prophets kept others in the dark and now God will bring them into the dark. God is going to do to them what they did to others.

A True Prophet in the Middle of the False Ones

Micah was very different than these false and selfish and greedy prophets. This difference is explained in Micah 3:8 (GOD IS THE DIFFERENCE!). The Spirit of God gave Micah power and courage to do the right thing and to say the right thing. Micah "told it like it is" and was not afraid to speak out against sin. His job was to show the people their sin (see also Isaiah 58:1). Do you think the people wanted to hear about their sin? ____ Did they need to hear about their sin? ____ Did Isaiah "tell it like it is" and tell the people about their sin just like Micah (see Isaiah chapter 1 and find some of the verses where he does this)? _____

Even today there are many people who want to have their ears itched and tickled (2 Timothy 4:3). They want to hear nice things and pleasing things, but they do not want to be told how sinful they really are. They want the preacher to tell them only good news ("PEACE") and not any bad news. But what must a true and faithful preacher do (2 Timothy 4:2)? _____

Suppose you had a deadly, growing cancer in your body that had to be removed or you would die. Would you want the doctor to tell you nice things ("there is nothing wrong with you; you are in perfect health") or would you want him to tell you the truth?

God gave Micah and Isaiah and other true prophets great power and courage and boldness (Micah 3:8). Does God want every believer to have POWER today (Acts 1:8)? _____ Where does this power come from (Micah 3:8 and Acts 1:8)? _____

Micah was a man who had a RIGHT HEART and therefore God could use him and bless him in a wonderful way.

In verse 9 (of Micah chapter 3) the princes or rulers are once again described. These princes hated justice (doing things in a fair and right way) and they perverted all equity. This means that they would twist everything that was straight! That would twist everything that was right and make it crooked and wrong! Micah tells of their sin in verse 10.

In verse 11 all of the leaders are mentioned (PRINCES or heads, PRIESTS and PROPHETS), and we learn that all of them were guilty of the same terrible sin: GREED! They were not serving God, but they were serving themselves! They wanted to help no one but themselves. For example, we are told that the rulers would allow themselves to be bribed. Suppose a criminal were to whisper to the judge, "If you say that I am not guilty, I'll give you \$100.00. This money might help you decide my case!" If the judge makes his decision simply because he wants the money, then he is guilty of taking a bribe. Did God's holy law say that a person should do this (see Exodus 23:8 and Deuteronomy 16:19)?

The leaders of God's people need to be very careful about money. Was the Apostle Paul out for money or was he trying to help people come to God (see Acts 20:31-35)? _____

_____ Did Paul have
a right heart ? _____

These sinful people were not thinking very straight (even their thinking was crooked and twisted). They said (verse 11), "IS NOT THE LORD AMONG US?" They thought that He really was among them! But can God really be among the wicked? Why did they think God was with them and among them? They probably thought something like this: "Is not the temple here? Are not we God's special people? Are not we the children of Abraham? Do we not have the 10 Commandments, God's holy law?" All of these things are fine and true, but God is after the heart !

They also said something else that was twisted: "NONE EVIL CAN COME UPON US!" In other words, they were saying, "No disaster will happen to us! Nothing bad will happen to us!" Is this correct thinking? Should sinful people think that nothing bad will happen to them? HOW CAN GOD BLESS SIN? If the heart is not right, then the person has a problem with God! Today a person might think something like this: "Nothing bad can happen to me because I go to church every week. God will not punish me!". Is this correct thinking? Does going to church make the heart right?

In verse 12 we discover that evil (disaster) was going to come upon them (even though they did not think it would). God was going to punish them because of their sin. The judgment of God is just and right (exactly what they deserved). Sinful man must reap the results of his sin. In 586 B.C. the Babylonian army came and destroyed the city of Jerusalem and this verse came to pass just as Micah had said. The city became like a HEAP of rubble (verse 12). We can read about this in Nehemiah 2:17 and 4:2. This great city became just like the town dump! Nothing but a heap of ruins!

Chapter 3 comes to a close by giving us a dark picture of God's terrible judgment on the city of Jerusalem. Chapter 4 is a bright chapter and we will see something wonderful there. Jerusalem, according to the end of Chapter 3, became a heap of rubble. In chapter 4 we will see that Jerusalem will become the greatest city in the world! Chapter 3 may have a dismal ending, but God wants us to learn a very important lesson! RELIGION and RITUAL is not enough. GOD WANTS OUR HEARTS TO BE RIGHT! Our problems will never be solved if our hearts do not get right. LET GOD FIX YOUR HEART TODAY!