

Aspire (Week 6) - Premeditated Avarice and
Rose-Colored Windbags (Micah 1-2)
Yesterday's Sermon Summary

1. Micah is one of the four earliest prophets in the Old Testament whose preaching is recorded in a biblical book (Hosea, Amos, and Isaiah are the other three). Micah ministered in the 700s BCE for a minimum of 35-40 years, spanning three kingships (Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah).

Whereas Isaiah was a priest in the capital city of Jerusalem, Micah was more rural, likely a farmer, acutely aware of the life experience of common folk.

2. Why might we need the voice of a prophet right now? Father Richard Rohr offers an answer in the introduction to his most recent book, *The Tears of Things - Prophetic Wisdom in an Age of Outrage*: "Like Israel in the Old Testament, God's people often forget not only what they have promised God but also how much and how deeply God cares for them. There is a deep need, then and now, for someone who would call the people to return to God and to justice. Someone who would warn God's people, critique them, and reveal God's heart to them. We call them prophets...they are radical change agents, teachers of a better moral alternative, and deconstructors of the prevailing order."

3. So what had Micah so agitated? Why was he so riled up? Well, his prophetic teaching was directed at two primary groups in Micah chp. 2. First up, he targets the powerful and affluent, who were in his estimation guilty of "premeditated avarice" ("avarice" meaning aggressive, exponential greed.) In [Micah 2.1-2](#) and [2.8-9](#), he accuses them of breaking both the 8th and 10th of the Ten Commandments: they are coveting fields and houses that don't belong to them, often those of the powerless and lowly (like widows), and they are forcibly stealing or seizing them.

4. This avarice is their obsession, Micah declares; they dream and scheme about it at night, and then act on those plans during the day because they're powerful and can do what they want. Their methods would have been varied: a rigged court system that favored the wealthy, predatory loans with an impossible repayment plan, or simply changing boundary markers. The Greek historian Thucydides, who wrote 300 years after Micah's ministry, offers an apt summary of the dynamic Micah is describing: "The strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must."

5. Micah is identifying a peril for humans and societies in every age: the more powerful or well-off you are, the more you might think you get to play by a different set of rules. Modern psychology has borne that out, it's called "moral immunity" or "moral licensing." Maurice Schweitzer of The Wharton Business School at the University of Pennsylvania describes that as follows: "When we have high power, we think of ourselves as exceptional as if the rules don't apply to us...We're much more prone to do what we want because we don't feel constrained in the way that less powerful people do. Powerful people think they'll never face the consequences for their reckless behavior. This misconception not only feeds entitlement, but also weakens self-awareness and empathy."

October 19, 2025	Little Isaiah
	
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6. Maybe more fundamentally, Micah's warning is simply that the more you want, the more you'll want, and/or the more you have, the more you'll want to have. Walter Harrelson, professor of the Hebrew Bible at Wake Forest U. says that this is at the root of what the scriptures call covetousness: "Covetousness is the sickness that can easily become a gnawing desire for more – not necessarily more of a given item, just more. The driving force in the lives of powerful and wealthy and successful folks can be, it seems, this desire for more...Those who covet can never be content with what they have, with what they have been given, or what they have earned. It is never enough."

7. The second group drawing the prophet's ire are the religious leaders and teachers of his day. In Micah [2.6-7](#) and [2.11](#), Micah reports what they're proclaiming: the good times will never stop, God's patience never runs out, and the powerful and influential need not listen to Micah because they're basically good people. In 2.11, Micah uses a couple of Hebrew words that when taken together could be translated "windbags": in short, Micah is calling these leaders/teachers rose-colored windbags "full of empty falsehoods."

8. So, according to Micah, it seems as if these are the telltale signs religion has sold its soul to the surrounding culture and become nothing but an accommodating, empty "windbag." First, it lowers its moral sense and standard to the surrounding culture. That which the culture names as good and bad this variety of religion never thinks to reassess or question. Thus, this sort of religion takes its cues from culture principally, not God nor scripture. And this kind of religion only exists to excuse or justify the actions of the state or the powerful

9. Second, it ignores the bad and proclaims only the good. The kind of religion described in Micah 2 excuses, ignores, or overlooks that which is blatantly hurtful and unjust in its own culture. It downplays how bad things really are, and the damage being done to far too many. And it denies that there will be inevitable consequences to longstanding injustice and immorality.

10. Third, most fundamentally it distorts and dilutes who God is and what God cares about. The God of "rose-colored, empty windbag religion" cares only about what society at large does; its God has the same priorities as the most influential or powerful people. And thus its God is no less than an idol, an act of self-expression and self-reflection, hewn and polished into a mirror image of the prevailing culture.