

The Books of Obadiah, Jonah, and Micah, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 7: Corrupt Leaders and the Coming Ruler from Bethlehem

Micah 3:1–5:15

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

Doctrinally, this is the heaviest lesson of the study, and its center is the Messianic prophecy of Micah 5:2. Teach it clearly: the ruler to come from little Bethlehem, whose “coming forth is from of old, from ancient days,” is fulfilled in Jesus Christ, born in Bethlehem (Matthew 2:1–6). The phrase about His coming forth from of old, from everlasting, points to His eternal preexistence and deity; this is no mere human king but the eternal Son who entered time. Let this anchor the lesson, and let the class see how precisely the Old Testament prophets pointed to Christ.

A second major doctrinal issue is the vision of the latter days in Micah 4:1–5. Handle it carefully against premillennial and dispensational misreadings. The mountain of the Lord's house established, the nations streaming in, and the law going out from Zion are not predictions of a future earthly, political kingdom or a millennial reign centered in national Israel. The “latter days” are this present gospel age (Acts 2:16–17; Hebrews 1:2), and the prophecy is fulfilled in the church, the kingdom Christ established, into which people from every nation are gathered. Christ is our peace (Ephesians 2:14), and His reign is spiritual and present, not a future political empire.

This passage also forms the student. It confronts the abuse of authority and calls us to servant leadership; it exposes presumption and calls us to genuine reliance on God; it lifts up the small and overlooked; and it centers our hope on the Shepherd-King who is our peace. Teach toward humility, true trust, and worship of Christ.

Question 1

Student Question:

Micah confronts rulers who “hate the good and love the evil” and devour the people they should protect (3:1–3). What does God's fierce response to corrupt leadership reveal about how seriously He takes the responsibility of those entrusted with authority over others?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Open with the searing indictment of the leaders in 3:1–3. They were charged to “know justice,” yet they “hate the good and love the evil,” and Micah uses the shocking image of cannibalism: they tear the skin off God's people and eat their flesh. Leaders meant to protect and nourish the flock were instead devouring it.

Teach how seriously God takes the responsibility of authority. Leadership is a stewardship, and those who hold it answer to God for how they use it. James warns that teachers will be judged with greater strictness (James 3:1), and Jesus reserved His sharpest words for leaders who burdened and exploited the people (Matthew 23). The higher the trust, the heavier the accountability.

Help the class see the betrayal involved. The sin of these rulers is not merely that they did wrong, but that they did wrong to the very people they were charged to serve, and from a position of trust. Exploitation by those who should protect is among the gravest of sins because it weaponizes a sacred responsibility.

Contrast this with God's design for leadership, which is fulfilled in Christ the good Shepherd. True authority in God's economy exists for the good of others, not the advancement of self. Set up the contrast that the chapter itself draws between these devouring rulers and the coming Shepherd-King of chapter 5.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Leadership is a stewardship for which we answer to God.
- God takes the responsibility of authority with great seriousness.
- Teachers and leaders face stricter judgment (James 3:1).
- Exploiting those we should protect weaponizes a sacred trust.
- True authority exists for the good of others, fulfilled in Christ the Shepherd.

Discussion Prompts

- Why does God respond so fiercely to corrupt leadership?
- Why is exploitation by those in a position of trust especially grievous?
- What does godly, servant leadership look like by contrast?

Question 2

Student Question:

Whether as a parent, employer, teacher, older friend, or church member, you hold some measure of trust over others. Where are you tempted to use a position of responsibility for your own benefit rather than for the good of those entrusted to you?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question brings the theme of authority down to the ordinary spheres every student occupies. Most of us are not national rulers, but all of us hold some position of trust: over children, employees, students, younger believers, or simply people who look up to us. The temptation to use that trust for ourselves is universal.

Help the class identify the subtle forms of self-serving authority: the parent who uses children to meet their own emotional needs, the employer who extracts more while giving less, the church member who serves to be seen, the mentor who keeps others dependent to feel important. These are quieter versions of Micah's devouring leaders.

Teach the heart issue. Self-serving leadership flows from treating our position as something owed to us rather than entrusted to us. The cure is to see every sphere of authority as a stewardship from God, to be used for the flourishing of those under our care.

Move toward concrete examination. Invite each person to name one relationship of trust and ask honestly whether they are using it to serve the other or themselves, and what a more self-giving posture would look like this week.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Everyone holds some position of trust over others.
- Self-serving authority takes subtle, respectable forms.
- We are tempted to treat positions as owed rather than entrusted.
- Every sphere of authority is a stewardship from God.
- Servant leadership uses trust for others' flourishing.

Discussion Prompts

- Where are you tempted to use a position of responsibility for your own benefit?
- What subtle forms can self-serving leadership take in a home or workplace?
- How would seeing your authority as entrusted, not owed, change how you use it?

Question 3

Student Question:

The prophets cried "peace" when they were fed and the leaders leaned on the Lord saying, "No disaster shall come upon us" (3:5, 11), all while living corruptly. How does false religious confidence give people a dangerous sense of security, and how can we tell the difference between true faith and mere presumption?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Verses 5 and 11 expose the religious corruption beneath the social corruption. The prophets prophesied for pay, the priests taught for a price, and the rulers gave judgment for a bribe, yet "they lean on the Lord and say, Is not the Lord in the midst of us? No disaster shall come upon us." They had turned God's presence into a guarantee of safety while ignoring His character.

Teach the difference between true faith and presumption. Presumption claims God's promises while ignoring God's commands; it treats grace as a license and God's favor as an entitlement.

True faith trusts God and therefore seeks to obey Him. The leaders had the words of faith ("the Lord is in our midst") with none of its substance.

Show how dangerous false security is. A person convinced they are safe will not flee danger. These leaders were so certain of God's protection that they felt free to do evil, which is precisely the mindset that invited judgment. Misplaced confidence keeps people from the repentance that could save them.

Apply the diagnostic. The test of genuine faith is not the confidence of our claims but the direction of our lives. Jesus warned that not everyone who says "Lord, Lord" will enter the kingdom, but those who do the will of the Father (Matthew 7:21-23). Words of devotion without a life of obedience are presumption, not faith.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Presumption claims God's promises while ignoring His commands.
- True faith trusts God and therefore seeks to obey Him.
- False security keeps people from saving repentance.
- Confidence in our claims is no substitute for a changed life.
- Saying "Lord, Lord" is not enough without doing God's will (Matthew 7:21).

Discussion Prompts

- How does false religious confidence give a dangerous sense of security?
- What is the difference between genuine faith and mere presumption?
- How can we tell whether our confidence in God is real or presumptuous?

Question 4

Student Question:

These leaders assumed God's presence guaranteed their safety regardless of how they lived. Where might you be presuming on God's grace, treating His favor as a guarantee while neglecting obedience? What would genuine reliance on God look like instead?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-focused question presses the theme of presumption into the student's own life. It is easy to condemn the leaders' "no disaster shall come upon us" while harboring a quieter version of the same attitude: assuming God's favor and blessing while neglecting some clear area of obedience.

Help the class locate their own presumption. It can sound like, "God knows my heart, so this habit does not really matter," or "I am basically a good person, so I do not need to deal with this," or relying on past faithfulness while drifting in the present. Presumption always finds a way to claim grace while avoiding obedience.

Distinguish presumption from genuine assurance. The believer can have real confidence in God's grace; that is the gospel. The difference is that true assurance produces gratitude and obedience, while presumption produces complacency and license. Assurance says, "Because I am loved, I will follow"; presumption says, "Because I am loved, it does not matter what I do."

Move toward genuine reliance. Invite the class to name one area where they have been presuming on God's grace and to bring it into honest obedience, trusting God's mercy not as a cover for sin but as the power to forsake it.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Presumption claims grace while neglecting obedience.
- It sounds like "God knows my heart" used to excuse sin.
- Genuine assurance produces gratitude and obedience.
- Presumption produces complacency and license.
- True reliance trusts mercy as power to forsake sin, not cover for it.

Discussion Prompts

- Where might you be presuming on God's favor while neglecting obedience?
- What is the difference between genuine assurance and presumption?
- What would genuine reliance on God look like in that area of your life?

Question 5

Student Question:

In contrast to the ruin of Zion, Micah sees "in the latter days" the mountain of the Lord's house established, with all nations flowing to it to learn God's ways (4:1-3). How is this vision fulfilled in the gospel age and the church drawing people from every nation, rather than in a future earthly, political kingdom, and why does that distinction matter?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question turns to the great vision of 4:1-3 and requires careful doctrinal handling. Micah sees "in the latter days" the mountain of the Lord's house established as the highest of mountains, with "all the nations" flowing to it, the law going out from Zion, and peoples learning God's ways. This is one of the clearest Old Testament pictures of the gospel age.

Teach the meaning of "the latter days." The New Testament identifies the last days as beginning with Christ's first coming and the outpouring of the Spirit. Peter at Pentecost said, "this is what was uttered through the prophet Joel: in the last days..." (Acts 2:16-17), and Hebrews says God has spoken "in these last days" by His Son (Hebrews 1:2). The latter days are now, this present gospel age.

Address the premillennial misreading directly but graciously. This vision is not a prophecy of a future earthly, political kingdom or a thousand-year reign centered in national Israel. The “mountain of the Lord’s house” to which the nations stream is the kingdom of God, the church, established when Christ began His reign (Daniel 2:44; Mark 9:1; Acts 2). The law going out from Zion is the gospel going out from Jerusalem to all nations (Luke 24:47; Acts 1:8).

Show the fulfillment in the church. The nations streaming in are the Gentiles coming to Christ; the one new people of God is drawn from every tribe and tongue (Ephesians 2:11–22; Revelation 7:9). Micah saw, centuries in advance, the worldwide ingathering that the gospel accomplishes. This matters because if we are still waiting for a future political kingdom, we miss the kingdom Christ has already established and into which we are called now.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The “latter days” began with Christ’s first coming and Pentecost (Acts 2:16–17; Hebrews 1:2).
- The mountain of the Lord’s house is the kingdom of God, the church.
- The vision is fulfilled in the gospel age, not a future political kingdom.
- The law from Zion is the gospel going to all nations (Luke 24:47).
- The nations streaming in are the Gentiles coming to Christ (Ephesians 2:11–22).
- Premillennial and dispensational readings miss the kingdom already established.

Discussion Prompts

- How is the vision of the nations streaming to God’s mountain fulfilled in the church?
- What does the New Testament mean by “the last days,” and when did they begin?
- Why does it matter not to read this as a future earthly, political kingdom?

Question 6

Student Question:

Micah pictures the peace of God’s reign: swords beaten into plowshares, each person sitting unafraid under vine and fig tree (4:3–4). Christ has come to bring this peace. How are you experiencing His peace, and where are you called to be a peacemaker who turns weapons into tools of blessing?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-focused question draws on the picture of peace in 4:3–4: swords beaten into plowshares, spears into pruning hooks, and each person sitting unafraid under their own vine and fig tree. This is the shalom that God’s reign brings, and the New Testament declares that Christ Himself is our peace (Ephesians 2:14).

Teach the nature of the peace Christ brings. It is first peace with God, the end of our hostility toward Him through the cross (Romans 5:1). From that flows peace within, the settled rest of a reconciled heart, and peace with others, the breaking down of dividing walls between people (Ephesians 2:14–16). The vision of plowshares is ultimately fulfilled not by politics but by the gospel that reconciles.

Help the class examine where they are experiencing this peace and where they are not. Many believers know peace with God in theory but live in inner turmoil or relational conflict. The question invites honest reflection on whether Christ's peace is actually governing their hearts and relationships (Colossians 3:15).

Call the class to be peacemakers. Jesus blessed the peacemakers as children of God (Matthew 5:9). To turn weapons into tools of blessing is to take the energy we might spend on conflict, defensiveness, or retaliation and redirect it toward reconciliation and service. Invite each person to name one relationship where they could be an agent of Christ's peace.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Christ Himself is our peace (Ephesians 2:14).
- His peace is peace with God, peace within, and peace with others.
- The vision of plowshares is fulfilled by the reconciling gospel.
- Christ's peace is meant to govern our hearts and relationships (Colossians 3:15).
- Believers are called to be peacemakers (Matthew 5:9).

Discussion Prompts

- Where are you experiencing Christ's peace, and where do you long for more of it?
- What does it mean that Christ Himself is our peace?
- In what relationship could you be a peacemaker who turns conflict into blessing?

Question 7

Student Question:

Micah promises that God will gather the lame and the outcast and make of them a remnant, and that the Lord will reign over them (4:6–7), and the coming Ruler will arise from little Bethlehem (5:2). What does God's pattern of choosing the small, the weak, and the overlooked reveal about how He works in the world?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question draws together two threads: God's promise to gather "the lame" and "the outcast" into a remnant over whom the Lord will reign (4:6–7), and His choice of little Bethlehem for the birth of the Ruler (5:2). Both reveal a consistent divine pattern: God works through the small, the weak, and the overlooked.

Teach this pattern across Scripture. God chose a barren couple to found a nation, a shepherd boy to be king, a despised remnant to carry His purposes, and a forgotten village to birth His Son. Paul makes the principle explicit: God chose the foolish, weak, and despised things to shame the strong, so that no human being might boast before Him (1 Corinthians 1:27–29).

Show why God works this way. When He uses the small and weak, it is unmistakable that the power and glory are His, not ours. This guards us from pride and points all credit to God. The pattern culminates in the cross, where God's power was displayed through apparent weakness and defeat.

Apply it to the class's view of significance. The world measures worth by size, strength, and visibility; God delights to overturn that scale. The remnant of the lame and outcast becomes the people over whom God reigns, and the little town becomes the birthplace of the King. God's economy runs opposite to the world's.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God consistently works through the small, weak, and overlooked.
- He chose Bethlehem, a shepherd boy, a despised remnant.
- God chooses the weak so the glory is unmistakably His (1 Corinthians 1:27–29).
- This pattern culminates in the power of God displayed at the cross.
- God's economy of worth runs opposite to the world's.

Discussion Prompts

- What does God's choice of the small and weak reveal about how He works?
- Why does God so often display His power through weakness?
- How does this challenge the world's measures of significance?

Question 8

Student Question:

Bethlehem was "too little to be among the clans of Judah," yet God chose it for the birth of the Messiah. When you feel small, overlooked, or insignificant, how does it encourage you that God delights to do great things through people and places the world considers little?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-focused question applies the Bethlehem principle ("too little to be among the clans of Judah") to the student's own sense of smallness. Many people carry a quiet conviction that they are too ordinary, too overlooked, or too insignificant for God to use. Bethlehem says otherwise.

Help the class receive the encouragement honestly. God did not bypass the little town; He chose it precisely. The same God delights to do significant things through unremarkable people who

make themselves available to Him. Our perceived smallness is not an obstacle to God; it is often His preferred canvas.

Guard against two errors. This is not a promise that God will make us famous or important by the world's standards; rather, it is the assurance that our littleness does not disqualify us from being part of God's great work. Faithfulness in small things is itself significant in God's eyes (Luke 16:10).

Move toward freedom and availability. The point is not to strive to become big but to offer our littleness to God. Invite each person to consider where they have held back because they felt too small, and to make themselves available to God in that place.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Perceived smallness does not disqualify us from God's purposes.
- God delights to work through ordinary, available people.
- Our littleness is often God's preferred canvas.
- Faithfulness in small things is significant to God (Luke 16:10).
- The call is to offer our littleness to God, not to strive to be big.

Discussion Prompts

- When do you feel small, overlooked, or insignificant?
- How does God's choice of little Bethlehem encourage you?
- Where have you held back because you felt too small to be used by God?

Question 9

Student Question:

Micah prophesies, "But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah... from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days" (5:2), the one who will shepherd his flock and be great to the ends of the earth, the one who "shall be their peace" (5:4-5). How is this prophecy fulfilled in Jesus, born in Bethlehem (Matthew 2:1-6), and what does "whose coming forth is from of old, from everlasting" tell us about who Christ truly is?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the heaviest doctrinal block of the entire study, and it rests on Micah 5:2-5, the prophecy that anchors the lesson: "But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days." Take time here; this is the heart of the matter.

First, establish the fulfillment in Christ. When the wise men sought the newborn king, Herod's scholars cited this very verse to point them to Bethlehem (Matthew 2:1-6). Jesus, of the line of David, was born in Bethlehem exactly as Micah foretold seven centuries earlier. The precision of

this prophecy is a powerful testimony that the Scriptures pointed forward to Christ and that God governs history toward His purposes.

Second, dwell on “whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days” (or “from everlasting”). This is no ordinary king. The phrase points to His eternal preexistence; the One born in Bethlehem in time had His goings forth from eternity. This is the deity of Christ in seed form: the eternal Son who was with God and was God (John 1:1–3; Micah’s ancient days meet John’s “in the beginning”). The babe of Bethlehem is the everlasting God in the flesh.

Third, draw out His work as Shepherd-King. He will “stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the Lord” and “shall be great to the ends of the earth” (5:4). His greatness is not regional but worldwide, fulfilled as the gospel reaches all nations. And then the breathtaking summary: “and he shall be their peace” (5:5). Not merely one who brings peace, but who is our peace, exactly as Paul says in Ephesians 2:14. Christ does not just negotiate peace; He is the peace between God and His people.

Finally, anchor the class’s hope and worship here. The corrupt leaders of chapter 3 stand in stark contrast to this perfect Shepherd-King. Every longing for a leader who will not exploit but lay down His life, who is both human (born in Bethlehem) and divine (from everlasting), is met in Jesus. Let the lesson rise to worship of Christ, the eternal Son, the Shepherd of His flock, and the peace of His people.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Micah 5:2 is fulfilled in Jesus, born in Bethlehem (Matthew 2:1–6).
- The precision of the prophecy testifies that Scripture points to Christ.
- “From of old, from everlasting” affirms Christ’s eternal preexistence and deity (John 1:1–3).
- The babe of Bethlehem is the everlasting God in the flesh.
- Christ is the Shepherd-King who is great to the ends of the earth (5:4).
- “He shall be their peace” is fulfilled in Christ our peace (Ephesians 2:14).
- The perfect Shepherd-King stands in contrast to the corrupt leaders of chapter 3.

Discussion Prompts

- How is Micah’s Bethlehem prophecy fulfilled in Jesus (Matthew 2:1–6)?
- What does “whose coming forth is from of old, from everlasting” tell us about who Christ is?
- What does it mean that Christ does not merely bring peace, but is our peace?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back over these three chapters, from corrupt leaders to the Ruler from Bethlehem. Name one specific way Jesus, the Shepherd-King who is our peace, is reshaping how you lead, how you trust God, and where you place your hope.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The capstone question asks the student to look back over these three chapters and name one specific way Christ, the Shepherd-King who is our peace, is reshaping their leading, their trusting, and their hope. Press for a concrete, personal answer.

Gather the threads: the seriousness of authority, the danger of presumption, the kingdom drawing in the nations, the peace of Christ, God's use of the small, and the Ruler from Bethlehem who is both human and divine. Each is a place the Spirit may be working.

Help different people land differently. For one, the lesson is leading more like the Shepherd than the devouring rulers. For another, it is trading presumption for genuine reliance. For another, it is worshiping Christ more deeply as the eternal Son born in Bethlehem, and resting in Him as their peace.

Close in prayer that turns the class toward Christ the Shepherd-King, asking Him to make us faithful in our spheres of trust and to be, ever more, our peace.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Transformation is specific and personal.
- Servant leadership, true trust, and worship of Christ are chief fruits.
- Christ the Shepherd-King is the contrast to every corrupt leader.
- The same text meets different hearts differently.
- Self-examination should end in worship and prayer.

Discussion Prompts

- Name one way Christ the Shepherd-King is reshaping how you lead or serve.
- Where do you most need to trade presumption for genuine reliance on God?
- How does worshiping Christ as the eternal Son born in Bethlehem deepen your hope?