

THE PROMISE OF ULTIMATE BLESSING

SERIES: WHO IS A GOD LIKE THEE?

By Doug Goins

Our worship, gratitude, and adoration here and now are triggered by our future hope. We anticipate how history will end: the consummation of all things, when Jesus Christ returns in power and glory to reign. Our hope for the future influences how we live now and whether or not in fact our souls can sing with joy to our Savior God, acknowledging his greatness. The apostle John reflects on this incredible, mysterious hope in his first letter. He writes, “Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we shall be. We know that, when [Jesus] appears, we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him just as He is. And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure” (1 John 3:2, 3).

The little book of Micah contains seven chapters. The first two chapters form a single message announcing judgment. Chapters 3, 4 and 5—the center of the book—focus on Israel’s Messianic hope for the future. In chapter 3, Micah rebuked the leaders of the nation for their sinful conduct and confronted them with the hard reality that judgment is coming because God doesn’t let people get away with sin. Now, beginning with chapter 4 and continuing in chapter 5, Micah outlines the events that will usher in the promised Messianic Kingdom. I know that Micah’s hope as he preached these words was that the people would hear this wonderful promise of Israel’s ultimate blessing, and that they would be convinced that God has such a glorious future planned for them as a nation that they would be motivated to turn from their sins—repent, and live lives of obedience and submission. Again, as the apostle John phrased it, “Everyone who has this hope fixed on Him, purifies himself just as He is pure.”

Chapter 3 ended on a note of despair. God’s judgment on sin is going to result in the complete destruction of the city of Jerusalem. Look at the last verse of Micah chapter 3:

“Therefore, on account of you, [that is, the spiritual and political leaders]
Zion will be plowed as a field,
Jerusalem will become a heap of ruins,
And the mountain of the temple will become high places of a forest.”

A Promised Kingdom

The chapter division after this verse is unfortunate because Micah continues to talk about Jerusalem. However, the mood changes significantly from this gloomy picture to an incredibly wonderful hope. Micah begins to describe the promised kingdom which the nation can anticipate. Chapter 4 begins, “And it will come about in the last days....” (Notice that last connective “and,” or it may say “but” in your Bible. There should be a connective there, but unfortunately the New International Version inaccurately omitted that.) Micah has just said (in the last verse of chapter 3) that the temple mountain will soon be just an overgrown hill covered with brush. In the last days, however, it will finally be exalted. The city of Jerusalem will become the center of the Messianic King’s gracious activity for all the peoples of the earth.

Now Micah, as a prophet, lifts his eyes and looks across the centuries—past the coming invasions of Assyria and Babylon, past the Greek Empire of Alexander the Great, past the Roman Empire and the reign of all the different Caesars—to the last days. Those “last days” began with the life of Jesus Christ,

the Messiah, born in Bethlehem of Judea, and born as “one coming from God,” the text will tell us. He is coming to be a sovereign ruler in Israel. Micah sees the climax of these last days far beyond our own time here and now. He looks into Christ’s future return to establish his kingdom on earth. He describes the future city of the King in the first four verses,

The future city of the King

**And it will come about in the last days
That the mountain of the house of the LORD
Will be established as the chief of the mountains.
It will be raised above the hills,
And the peoples will stream to it.
And many nations will come and say,
“Come and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD
And to the house of the God of Jacob,
That He may teach us about His ways
And that we may walk in His paths.”
For from Zion will go forth the law,
Even the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.**

[Then the passage narrows down to a person]

**And He will judge between many peoples
And render decisions for mighty, distant nations.
Then they will hammer their swords into plowshares
And their spears into pruning hooks;
Nation will not lift up sword against nation,
And never again will they train for war.
And each of them will sit under his vine
And under his fig tree,
With no one to make them afraid,
For the mouth of the LORD of hosts has spoken. (Micah 4:1-4)**

Micah’s hope is centered on the promise of God. There is no doubt about the author of this message, the authority of his words, or their fulfillment: Look at the first line of chapter 4 again, “And it *will* come about in the last days...,” and the last line of verse 4, “For the mouth of the Lord of hosts has spoken.” In these verses, God says three important things about the city. First of all, Jerusalem will once again be a city of pre-eminence. It will be the most important city of the world, just like it was under the reign of King David and King Solomon. The last line of verse 1 says, “peoples will stream to it,” or “people will flow to it.” The first line of verse 2 adds, “many nations,” or your Bible may say, “great nations” will come. Micah chooses a very unusual word, the word “flow,” as in “people flowing” to landlocked Jerusalem. I think it’s a challenge to the false religion of Babylon, because vassal nations literally floated on the Tigris and Euphrates rivers by boat to Babylon to worship their god, Marduk. In this millennial age, they will “flow” *uphill* to Mount Zion. Babylon was to the ancient Near East what Rome was to the Middle Ages, or what Mecca is to Islam today.

Verse 2 makes clear that Jerusalem will have unmatched influence. The nations will not come to Jerusalem as do tourists and pilgrims today just to sightsee. The primary motivation for going to Jerusalem will be to hear the word of God. All the nations will submit to the unique authority of God’s law. The goal of his teaching will be practical direction of people’s lives, so that people will end up walking in ways that are consistent with his character.

Finally—and this should be a great word of encouragement to all of you Bible-study leaders—the study

of God's Word will be absolutely persuasive. It will be effective. It will transform people. Verse 3 tells us that Jerusalem will become the center for world peace. When all these nations arrive, they will allow Messiah to judge their selfishness and their brutal political purposes. King Jesus will sit as royal judge among the nations of the world to settle disputes and to iron out all their differences. He will remove the reasons for international conflict so people won't ever need to resort to war again. All of the tribal hatreds and ethnic battles that have existed since the beginning of time will finally be resolved, once and for all. Weapons of war will be melted down and re-made into instruments of agriculture. The implements of death will be made to cultivate life. As a consequence, in verse 4, we see a beautiful picture of people enjoying a comfortable sense of security, plenty to eat, free from worry and anxiety. The promise is that, because of Messiah's influence, individuals will experience personal peace and personal freedom from fear. That is the future of the city of the King.

The motivation to walk with the King now

Verse 5 focuses momentarily on the present realities surrounding Micah in eighth-century BC in Judah. It is a confession or response of faith and a commitment by some of the godly people who are listening to Micah in Jerusalem, part of the remnant of Israel. This vision of the future kingdom age that we have just seen in the first four verses gives them the motivation to walk with the king here and now.

**Though all the peoples walk
Each in the name of his god,
As for us, we will walk
In the name of the LORD our God forever and ever.**

This verse can't refer to the future, because during the millennium all the nations *will* worship the Lord God. It's already made clear in the first four verses. This is an affirmation of faith on the part of true believers, a wonderful description of walking by faith and not by sight. Even though the times would become horribly difficult for even innocent people in Israel, they are still able to trust God in disastrous situations. In light of the promises of God, trusting him is the most sensible act of faith that anybody can propose. This commitment to God is a life-and-death matter for his people. It is an unending commitment. It's not just a momentary foxhole cry for help while they are in a tough spot. It's forever and ever.

The future people of the King

The first phrase in verse 6, "in that day," returns our focus to the future age of Jerusalem's pre-eminence, the "last days" that were introduced in verse 1. Verses 6 and 7 describe the future people of the king.

**"In that day," declares the LORD,
I will assemble the lame,
And gather the outcasts,
Even those whom I have afflicted.
I will make the lame a remnant,
And the outcasts a strong nation,
And the LORD will reign over them in Mount Zion
From now on and forever.**

Micah depicts these re-gathered Jews as lame, referring to their weakness as a result of God himself afflicting them. He also describes them as outcasts, or "exiles." It really emphasizes their guilt and their shame. They have been run out of their home country because of national sin. The emphasis is on misery and the helplessness of these exiles, but it provides a wonderfully strong contrast with the new

beginning described here. A strong nation is going to be created through Messiah's miraculous intervention. The great shepherd of the sheep will gather his injured, sin-sick sheep of Israel and bring them safely home. We are promised that in the next chapter:

“And he will arise and shepherd his flock
In the strength of the LORD,
In the majesty of the name of the LORD His God.
And they will remain,
Because at that time He will be great
To the ends of the earth.” (Micah 5:4)

The future authority of the King's city

The climax of this preview of the promised Messianic kingdom's future glory is described in terms of restoration. It will be given its former dominion. Verse 8 describes the future authority of the city of the King:

**“And as for you, tower of the flock,
Hill of the daughter of Zion,
To you it will come—
Even the former dominion will come,
The kingdom of the daughter of Jerusalem.”**

This points back to the reign of King David, the shepherd-king of Israel. During his reign, Jerusalem was like a watchtower in which the shepherd seated himself to watch over the entire flock of the nation. People in this New Jerusalem will be given new names that reflect the ancient strength of David, a righteous and godly king. “Tower of the flock” is one of the great new names. It speaks of stability and immovable strength. And again, Messiah, the son of David, will one day return to reign in Jerusalem and care for his flock as a faithful eternal shepherd.

Now we need to step back a bit from this wonderful vision of the future and ask how it applies to us practically, in our life of faith here and now. Our studies in the first three chapters of Micah have shown us how dangerous and chaotic life was in Micah's day in Judah. Our world is at least as unsettled as his was. “Wars and rumors of wars” are featured on CNN Headline News 24 hours a day. The fear of terrorism has our country almost paralyzed. A precarious economy makes us all insecure. And now there are bio-threats like Anthrax and Smallpox that have joined AIDS on our most-feared-disease list. Our world is as dangerously violent and our leadership almost as corrupt as that of ancient Judah.

The fulfillment of this vision—Micah's vision of this promised Messianic Kingdom—is of paramount importance to the ultimate future of the world we all live in. Even though we can't see it now, the good news here is that God does have a plan already in progress. So, as followers of Christ, we are motivated to follow his leadership even in difficult times. Practically, this means that we don't have to be afraid that the world is spinning out of control. Whether we experience prosperity, natural disaster or disease, whether we experience good fortune or accidents or persecution, none of that—the good or the bad—can undo or frustrate the final goal God has for each one of us in Christ Jesus. We may not understand why things happen the way they do. We may not know how God is ever going to straighten out the mess the world is in. But we can look confidently at the future, knowing that eventually, God will put all the parts together in such a way that his plan is accomplished and the picture will finally make sense.

There is a challenge in verse 5 to walk in God's ways. Trusting him for the future is so important, not only in crisis situations where there is mass confusion and little hope, but also in times when everything

seems to be going smoothly. Knowledge of God's sovereign control over the future gives us comfort and confidence when we don't know which way to turn. Since God's plans are sure and he has the power to complete them, he really is a leader worth following. There is something about understanding God's overall future plans for this world at Christ's return, that fills us with hope and stirs up our urgency. It also keeps us involved in what's going on around us. It keeps us from being paralyzed by fear or anxiety. If we embraced and practiced this principle of walking in God's way, trusting his leadership, seeing him as the only basis for hope, it would change the way we do church. Every one of us—every believer, every church group or committee, every leader in the church—would be affected. The church would be transformed, putting an end to anemic, fearful faith and the petty politics that are too often the norm.

Let me ask you this: Are you consciously looking for God's leadership in the midst of your crisis? How does God's character, his leadership and his future plans for the world motivate you to active involvement in the needs around you today? Is your hope fixed on him? C.S. Lewis writes this about hope:

Hope is one of the theological virtues. This means that a continual looking forward to the eternal world is not (as some modern people think) a form of escapism or wishful thinking, but one of the things a Christian is meant to do. It does not mean that we are to leave the present world as it is. If you read history, you will find that the Christians who did most for the present world were just those who thought most of the next... It is since Christians have largely ceased to think of the other world that they have become so ineffective in this. Aim at heaven, and you will get earth "thrown in"; aim at earth, and you will get neither. (1)

Micah would certainly fit the category of one whose hope in God's ultimate eternal plans and purposes kept him actively involved in the spiritual needs of his day. He yearned for the glory of the promised kingdom, but he was bound in time within his own historical context just as we are. Just as I reflected on the sorry state of our world today, in verses 9-13 of chapter 4, Micah again looks at the sorry state of Judah in his day. The word "now" which begins verses 9 and verse 11, introduces a scene of present distress for Judah. Verse 9 says, "Now, why do you cry out loudly?" And verse 11, "And now many nations have been assembled against you." Our attention is very abruptly shifted from the glorious description of Jerusalem's future hope, back to the realities of the current crisis.

Both of the final paragraphs have a command for God's people to obey. Verse 10 begins with the command, "Writhe and labor to give birth, Daughter of Zion;" and verse 13, "Arise and thresh, daughter of Zion...." Both paragraphs have a final promise of God's saving activity in Israel's life in the future Messianic kingdom, as we see at the end of verse 10:

**"There you will be rescued;
There the LORD will redeem you
From the hand of your enemies."**

Also, in the middle of verse 13:

**"For your horn I will make iron
And your hoofs I will make bronze,
That you may pulverize many peoples,
That you may devote to the LORD their unjust gain
And their wealth to the Lord of all the earth."**

Promised deliverance

Let's look at verses 9 and 10 now, which promise deliverance:

**“Now, why do you cry out loudly?
Is there no king among you,
Or has your counselor perished,
That agony has gripped you like a woman in childbirth?
Writhe and labor to give birth,
Daughter of Zion,
Like a woman in childbirth,
For now you will go out of the city,
Dwell in the field,
And go to Babylon.
There you will be rescued;
There the LORD will redeem you
From the hand of your enemies.**

The message in verse 9 is, “Don't resist the fact that deliverance comes through purposeful judgment.” Micah challenges their lack of faith. “Why are you crying out in distress?” he asks. “Have you lost sight of your true king? Your trusted counselor?” One of Israel's cardinal sins was trusting human leadership more than she trusted God. Remember, in Isaiah chapter 9, one of Messiah's title is to be “Wonderful Counselor.” He says to Israel, “In the face of Assyrian invasion and exile, in the face of Babylonian invasion and exile, focus on the True King and the Divine Counselor who can deliver you, for they are the only ones who can. You cannot save yourselves.” He also challenges the fact that they can't see beyond the pain of judgment. It will be like childbirth, with its excruciating labor pains. But the joy of the new birth, of gazing at that little life, will make the whole process worth it. Micah challenges Israel to let God's judgment do its work, submit to the labor pains and allow them to have their result. And how does Israel do that? By accepting the fact that *deliverance comes from being humbled, and being made vulnerable* through purposeful judgment.

Verse 10 contains some very frightening images of exile. First of all, they will suffer the humiliation of being driven out of the comfort, safety, and security of their city. Second, we have a picture of the people being exposed and vulnerable, sleeping out in the wilderness on their way to Babylon. We have seen both of these types of scenes on television recently: Afghan families running for their lives from their cities, fleeing into exile, with all their possessions on their backs, living in the wilderness. Picture the nation Israel running for their lives and heading into exile. The third image is they will end up in the great, frightening city of Babylon, the world center of raw power, naked military aggression, and powerful religious idolatry. The irony in all of this is that God wants to heal them. To cleanse them from idolatry, he sends them into the belly of the beast so that they will be so sick of it, they can be brought back and be redeemed.

In verses 9 and 10, Micah is challenging Israel to cultivate a faith that submits to God's judgment. He calls them to allow themselves to be humbled, to be made vulnerable. God can then rescue them, but it will be for his glory, not theirs. Again, Israel can put her present problems in the larger framework of God's ultimate plan for his people. The hopeful good news is that God isn't giving up on them. He is committed to them in spite of their sin and present failure. They can confidently look forward to God's ultimate good for them, redemption.

A Promised Conquest

Turn now to Micah's final word of hope to Israel in this chapter, a promised conquest which gives them

the courage to arise and thresh.

**And now many nations have been assembled against you
Who say, 'Let her be polluted,
And let our eyes gloat over Zion.'
But they do not know the thoughts of the LORD,
And they do not understand His purpose;
For He has gathered them like sheaves to the threshing floor.
Arise and thresh, daughter of Zion,
For your horn I will make iron
And your hoofs I will make bronze,
That you may pulverize many peoples,
That you may devote to the LORD their unjust gain
And their wealth to the Lord of all the earth. (Micah 4:11-13)**

The King's secret strategy

The King has a secret strategy for the nations who are invading his kingdom. That prophecy was immediately fulfilled in Micah's lifetime when God destroyed 185,000 Assyrian troops under Sennacherib when they were besieging Jerusalem. Jerusalem was delivered, but within a very few years the city was completely destroyed by the Babylonians. It is true that they returned from exile and they did rebuild the city, but not to its former glory. In 70 AD, the Roman Empire thoroughly destroyed the city of Jerusalem, plowing it level.

So Israel still awaits the ultimate fulfillment of these promises. Throughout recorded history, Jerusalem has been a magnet for war, conquest, violence and turmoil, up to this very day. Simply look at the daily news from Israel to see that Jerusalem is not yet a place of peace and security. She is still surrounded by nations who want to destroy her. Behind that opposition is the work of a satanic enemy whose aim is to rid the earth of any influence of Israel's God and his Messiah, Jesus. In his commentary on Micah, James May focuses on the spiritual reality that has been consistent throughout history. He writes, "When nations see *themselves* as the center of history and seek a destiny that fulfills their power, they can tolerate no Zion. They are gripped with a compelling need to destroy whatever stands in judgment and restraint on their pride." (2)

To emphasize the foolishness of this kind of pride, the haughty arrogance, in verse 12 Micah contrasts the attackers' ideas with God's ideas. They have this brilliant military strategy to gather at Jerusalem for the final battle, but actually God is the one gathering them. It's a wonderfully recurring vision of Israel's Messianic future. Jerusalem is not yet the daughter of Zion. Today, the nation Israel is a thoroughly secular state. But looking down the centuries to the end of the times, the prophet tells God's people in verse 13 that they will be able to take courage; they will conquer, knowing that the King will strengthen his people supernaturally.

Take courage and conquer

It will be for his purposes, to extend his dominion, not for Israel's glory. The Gentile nations are gathered against Jerusalem, gloating over Israel, certain they can defeat the Jews. The nations are sure of victory because they ignore the Scriptures; they don't have a clue about God's commitment to his people and his ultimate purposes for them. The prophet Jeremiah wrote to the nation in exile as prisoners in Babylon: "'For I know the plans that I have for you,' declares the LORD, 'plans for welfare not for calamity to give you a future and a hope'" (Jeremiah 29:11).

To the nations around her, redeemed Israel will look weak and defenseless. But the Lord will make

Israel's soldiers into sharp threshing machines. In the words of Revelation 14, they will "harvest the nations." God will give them a horn, which is a symbol of power, and hooves of bronze so they will have both power and speed when they attack their enemies. When the last battle is over, the victorious army of the Messianic King will devote all the wealth of the world to him. The might of the world will be once and for all under his dominion.

Once again, Micah's message reminds ancient Israel, and us as well, that God is in control of the future. I know it is really tough to balance the present realities that we live in with that future hope. The day of the Lord's coming, the establishment of the Messiah's worldwide Kingdom, has not yet arrived. It's even hard to see evidence of it. Today, we live in the sinful world of wars and trouble. But the good news is that hope is not destroyed by our present reality in this world. Messianic hope produces faith in God's promises and a commitment to be courageous and live victoriously in his ways. It also creates patient endurance as we wait for the ultimate fulfillment of all the promises that God has made. The apostle Paul writes in Romans:

Therefore having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand; and we exult in hope of the glory of God. And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; and hope does not disappoint because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us. (Romans 5:1-5)

We received all that through the finished work of Christ on the cross. And that great salvation allows us to exult in hope of the glory of God. What Jesus did for us in the past guarantees our hope for the future. When he went to the cross for us, Jesus beautifully fulfilled the call of God to Israel in verses 9 and 10 of Micah chapter 4. Jesus did not resist the fact that salvation and deliverance had to come through God's purposeful judgment on sin. He did accept the fact that salvation meant he had to be vulnerable. He had to be humiliated, stripped naked before his enemies. And he was willing to go to the cross and accept all that sin onto himself. The sad thing is that Israel was not able to accept God's call of submission to judgment. She was dragged into Babylon, kicking and screaming. In fact, most of her national history has been one of struggle, resistance and fighting all through the Diaspora.

In ironic contrast, Jesus, the only truly innocent, perfect Israelite, accepted humiliation, vulnerability and God's purposeful judgment of sin—our sin—and he took it upon himself on the cross. There is a beautiful Messianic parallel to this section in Micah in Isaiah, chapter 53. It speaks of Jesus, the Lamb of God, the Messiah:

He was oppressed and He was afflicted,
Yet He did not open His mouth;
Like a lamb that is led to slaughter,
And like a sheep that is silent before its shearers,
So He did not open His mouth.
By oppression and judgment He was taken away;
And as for His generation, who considered
That He was cut off out of the land of the living,
For the transgression of my people to whom the stroke was due?
(Isaiah 53:7-8)

You see, we are his descendants. We are God's people.

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NOTES:

(1) C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*. Copyright © 1958, Macmillan Company, New York, NY. P. 104.

(2) James L. May, *Micah: A Commentary*. Copyright © 1976, Westminster Press, Philadelphia, PA. P. 109.

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Micah 4:1-13

4th Message

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