

THE ONCE AND FUTURE KING

SERIES: WHO IS A GOD LIKE THEE?

By Doug Goins

Micah of Morasheth was burdened with a prophetic gift of discernment from God. Almost in spite of himself, Micah saw God at work behind the dramatic changes on the national scene as well as the international scene, all of which affected his people deeply. Micah saw judgment coming, first on the northern kingdom of Israel. He foresaw the fall of that nation to Assyria in 722 BC. God warned him of the fall of Jerusalem and the southern kingdom which was going to come from the Babylonians in 586 BC. Micah tried to call his people, the Jewish nation, back to faithful worship and sincere, loving obedience to God and his covenant relationship with them. But the people refused to listen. We have seen how he pleaded for social justice. He asked his people to be more concerned about the poor and helpless among them, but the people wouldn't repent. They didn't pay any attention.

The book of Micah is organized around three messages that come from the Lord. Chapters 1 and 2 are a warning message: Divine judgment is coming on both Israel and Judah. Micah's second message, at the heart of the book in chapters 3-5, is a message of promise focusing on the nation's future. He announces hope—a deliverer is coming to captive Israel, and he will restore and reunite Judah and Israel. We come to the conclusion of that message today in chapter 5 as we look at “the once and future king.” Chapters 6 and 7 contain Micah's final message. That final message is one of challenge to us. Are we going to do something with this incredible vision that God has given us for the future? Can we trust God? Can that trust in him then lead us in obedience to live the lives he has called us to live now?

Micah urges his people to repent. He warns them that the only way they will escape judgment, experience God's blessing, and be able to be used by God in their surroundings is to respond to what they have come to understand as true. Micah's passion is the same in all three of these messages: He wants his people to abandon idolatry. He wants them to return, which means repent, and embrace sincere faith in the Lord.

We know from biblical history that Judah, under King Hezekiah, did respond to part of Micah's message in chapter 3, and God delivered Jerusalem from an Assyrian invasion in a siege after the fall of the northern kingdom. That spiritual revival was shallow, however, and short-lived, as was another which occurred later under King Josiah. Within a hundred years of Micah's preaching, Jerusalem was completely destroyed by the Babylonians.

This issue of superficial religious responses continues in our day. A recent *New York Times* article by Laurie Goodstein describes this well:

Americans, who after the September 11 terrorists attacks turned to religion in an outpouring that some religious leaders hailed as a spiritual great awakening, have now mostly returned to their former habits. Frank Newport, editor and chief of the Gallup organization, the Gallup Polls, says, “I just don't see much indication that there has been a great awakening or a profound change in America's religious practices. It looks like people were treating this like a bereavement, a shorter-term funeral kind of thing where they went to church or synagogue to grieve, but now the grieving is over.” (1)

The future King of Zion

Micah speaks to that sensitivity. The first verse of chapter 5 focuses our attention on impending disaster. It introduces a scene of distress that is either already upon them or imminent. It's very much like our experience of the September 11 attack on the World Trade Center. He writes,

**Now muster yourselves in troops, daughter of troops;
They have laid siege against us;
With a rod they will smite the judge of Israel on the cheek.** (Micah 5:1)

This is the third in a series of invitations to look at what is going on around them. In chapter 4 we heard two other similar statements that began with the word “now”:

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?...
And now many nations have been assembled against you
Who say, “Let her be polluted,
And let our eyes gloat over Zion.” (Micah 4:9, 11)

The third instance appears in verse 1 of chapter 5, “Now muster yourselves in troops, daughter of troops....”

All three of those images graphically depict coming national disaster for Judah. Before Micah introduces the good news—the hope of this once and future king, the focus of the first five verses—he requires the people to consider the present humiliation of the earthly kings or judges of the nation. He says they will be struck across the face. This represents a national leaders' inability to defend himself. Sennacherib verbally humiliated King Hezekiah during the Assyrian invasion and he required enormous financial tribute from the nation's treasury. During the Babylonian invasion, Nebuchadnezzar physically violated King Zedekiah after he tried to escape from the city of Jerusalem. After he was captured, his sons were brought in and executed right in front of him. Then they put out his two eyes and dragged him off to Babylon in chains.

In verse 1, Micah is re-emphasizing the point he made in the rhetorical question we read earlier, “Is there no king among you?” Israel would never find her true king, her true deliverer, in human leadership. All the kings born in Jerusalem had failed in their spiritual leadership of the nation, but Micah knew that a true king was coming. A small spark of hope had been kindled in his heart at the end of that first message, the last two verses of chapter 2,

I will surely assemble all of you, Jacob.
I will surely gather the remnant of Israel.
I will put them together like sheep in the fold;
Like a flock in the midst of its pasture
They will be noisy with men.
The breaker goes up before them;
They break out, pass through the gate, and go out by it.
So their king goes on before them,
And the Lord at their head.

That spark of hope was fanned into flame by the glorious vision we saw in the beginning of chapter 4, of God's promised Messianic King and the kingdom that was coming. Now his hope for the future blazes as God gives him some of the most specific and most important prophecies in the entire Old Testament about the coming of Messiah, Jesus Christ the King. Beginning in verse 2, Micah looks seven hundred years ahead to the birth of Jesus and describes the future rule of this Messianic King.

**“But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah,
Too little to be among the clans of Judah,
From you One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel.
His goings forth are from long ago,
From the days of eternity.”
Therefore, He will give them up until the time
When she who is in labor has borne a child.
Then the remainder of His brethren
Will return to the sons of Israel.
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.
And this One will be our peace. (Micah 5:2-5a)**

Verse 2 tells us that his beginnings are *humanly* insignificant. The birthplace of the King was not in the great city of Jerusalem, but in the little village of Bethlehem, nestled in the hills southwest of Jerusalem, a village too small to attract the attention of foreign conquerors. As we know from the gospel stories, his birth was in the barren simplicity of a stable.

But the second half of verse 2 also tells us that his beginnings are *divinely* significant. Messiah is the eternal God. The apostle John wrote of him, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God” (John 1:1-2). Jesus stepped out of eternity into human history, sent by his Father for a purpose: to die for the sins of the world. Again the apostle John writes, “We have beheld and bear witness that the Father has sent the Son to be the Savior of the world” (1 John 4:14).

Jesus was God but he was also man, truly man. He was born as a human child and laid on the straw of the manger at his birth. Again the apostle John bears witness that “the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth”(John 1:15). That is the Christmas miracle of incarnation. Jesus comes as one, Micah tells us, who will be in submission to his heavenly Father. God says through the prophet Micah, “One will go forth *for me*.” The King didn't come to serve himself, unlike all the Jewish kings before him in the line of David clear down to Micah's time. The Messiah came to serve the Lord in perfect, loving obedience to him.

His roles in ministry, this one to come, are summarized in this little paragraph. And here's where we as Christians are finally folded into this encouraging prophetic book. In verse 2, Jesus was proclaimed as our ruler, our sovereign, the Lord of our lives. In verse 4 he is our good shepherd, and in verse 5 he is our peace.

In verse 3, however, there is another parenthetical reference to Israel's final millennial restoration and return from exile and dispersion:

**Therefore, He [God] will give them [the nation of Israel] up until the time
When she who is in labor has borne a child.
Then the remainder of His brethren
Will return to the sons of Israel.**

Micah here is anticipating the national rejection of Jesus the Messiah by his own people. Israel will be given up by God during an interim period between the historic event of Jesus' crucifixion and his final glorious return to establish the Kingdom age as a Shepherd Ruler who can care for his brothers—the sons of Israel, those who share a common national heritage with him. The prophet Isaiah predicted the same thing about when Jesus returns. He talks about the nation being born into her kingdom. Isaiah writes,

Who has heard such a thing? Who has seen such things?
Can a land be born in one day?
Can a nation be brought forth all at once?
As soon as Zion travailed, she also brought forth her sons.
(Isaiah 66:8)

In our New Testament age, the apostle Paul describes the same events of this interim period of Israel's being given up, and of Micah's vision of the time when Messiah's brethren, the sons of Israel, return to their King, whom they rejected at Golgotha. Paul calls it a mystery:

...a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fulness of the Gentiles has come in; and thus all Israel will be saved; just as it is written,
“THE DELIVERER WILL COME FROM ZION,
HE WILL REMOVE, [that's yet future, Paul says] UNGODLINESS FROM JACOB.”
“AND THIS IS MY COVENANT WITH THEM,
WHEN I TAKE AWAY THEIR SINS.” (Romans 11:25)

Verse 4 establishes Jesus as more than a King. He is in reality a Shepherd King. This image of loving, protective leadership recurs throughout the book of Micah. Messiah was pictured at the end of chapter 2 as a shepherd gathering the remnant like sheep in a fold or a flock in the midst of its pasture. In chapter 3, we shuddered at the image of shepherds who have turned into predators, devouring the sheep instead of feeding and caring for them. Finally, when we get to chapter 7 at the end of the book, Messiah will lead like a king and he will care like a shepherd. He will exercise both of those ministries in what Micah calls an inexhaustible supply of strength that will come from God. He will rule in the majesty of the name of his God. Micah sees a time when all of redeemed humanity—Jew and Gentile alike—will finally remain and be eternally secure in the care of our great shepherd.

The opening phrase in verse 5 says, “And this One will be our peace.” Today, we are promised peace through Jesus Christ. Paul writes this in Ephesians 2.

But now [right now] in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace... [He abolished sin, abolished death]... that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, thus establishing peace, and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity. (Ephesians 2:13-16)

We have been given an incredible leader, this Christ who went to the cross, who is our King, our shepherd and our peace.

The future deliverance of Zion

The last three paragraphs in this chapter begin with the exact same phrase in the original Hebrew. The phrase, “and it will be” begins verses 5, 7, and 10. It doesn’t appear in our English Bibles until the third paragraph, but each paragraph literally translated would read as follows:

Verse 5: “And [it will be] this One, our peace.

Verse 7: “And [it will be] the remnant of Jacob among the peoples.”

Verse 10: ““And it will be in that day,’ declares the Lord...”

The modifier in verse 10, “that day,” is identical to the phrase from Micah 4:6 which focused us on Jerusalem’s future Messianic pre-eminence, being restored as a city of influence throughout the world. It is similar to the “last days” of 4:1. With those phrases, “the last days” and “in that day,” we are looking beyond our own time to Christ’s future return to establish his Kingdom on earth. These last ten verses described what God will do through his Messiah just prior to and during this millennial period.

Let’s take a closer look at each paragraph. First of all, verses 5 and 6 describe the future deliverance or salvation of Zion.

**And [it will be] this One our peace.
When the Assyrian invades our land,
When he tramples on our citadels,
Then will raise against him
Seven shepherds and eight leaders of men.
And they will shepherd the land of Assyria with the sword,
The land of Nimrod at its entrances;
And He [“the One who will be our peace”] will deliver us from the Assyrian
When he attacks our land
And when he tramples our territory. (Micah 5:5, 6)**

Messiah will raise up spiritual leaders for Israel who will lead Israel’s victory over the world powers who oppress them. The Assyrian mentioned here is certainly not the Assyrian army of Micah’s day, because the Jewish nation never did defeat Assyria or rule over her land. It was always the other way around. Nimrod, who is mentioned there, was described in chapter 10 of Genesis as the arrogant, powerful founder of the first ancient kingdom of Babylonia. These enemies are representative of all the world powers that have oppressed Israel in the past, or will in the future. These lands of Assyria, of Nimrod, designate the godless nations from which a final re-gathering of Israel is to take place. Enemies of Israel will gather against her in the last days, but the promise here is that Jesus will raise up national leaders to face the enemy. But it will be *His* resources and *His* power as Messiah that will enable the nation to conquer, not their own strength, military might or strategy.

The Prophet Zechariah anticipates this future deliverance, this future victory of Zion.

“I will bring them back from the land of Egypt [God says],
And gather them from Assyria;
And I will bring them into the land of Gilead and Lebanon,
Until no room can be found for them....
And I shall strengthen them in the LORD
and in His name they will walk,” declares the LORD....

And it will come about in that day that I will set about to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem.

(Zechariah 10:10, 12; 12:9)

The future vindication of Zion

That's their deliverance. Verses 7 to 9 focus on the vindication of Zion.

**Then [it will be] the remnant of Jacob
Will be among many peoples
Like dew from the LORD,
Like showers on vegetation
Which do not wait for man
Or delay for the sons of men.
And the remnant of Jacob
Will be among the nations,
Among many peoples
Like a lion among the beasts of the forest,
Like a young lion among flocks of sheep,
Which, if he passes through,
Tramples down and tears,
And there is none to rescue.
Your hand will be lifted up against your adversaries,
And all your enemies will be cut off. (Micah 5:7-9)**

Israel will be a scattered remnant, as they are now across the face of the earth. They must wait for Messiah's promised restoration, but it is coming. The promise is that Messiah will triumph over the enemies of his remnant. Micah pictures Israel among the nations of the earth and the Diaspora. Believing Jewish people in the last days will experience tremendous help from Messiah as they return to the land and face their enemies.

Micah uses two pictures or analogies to illustrate the help they receive from God. The first is the image of dew, or rain showers. Think about precipitation, whether it is dew or showers or pounding rain storms. It's always a mysterious gift from God. Humankind does not control the weather—all we can do is wait for it to rain. I think Micah's point to Israel is that there is little or nothing that they can do to control the future. All they can do is trust the sovereign plan of God and wait for him to act. The divine initiative on their behalf will accomplish everything he has promised, but it will be in *his* timing and according to *his* purposes.

Micah also uses the strength of a lion to illustrate God's help. Verse 8 compares the remnant to a mauling lion. I think this analogy affirms the promise back in verses 5 and 6 about defeating their enemies. The last line of verse 8 is very important: "And there is none to rescue." That focuses Israel's attention on God's control over these events. No one is going to rescue these evil nations because God has determined their destiny. With a statement of guaranteed victory, in verse 9, we are reminded of Psalm 2, the psalm of Messianic victory. The forces of evil cannot triumph over the Lord and his anointed. Neither Israel nor the pagan nations of the world are in control of their own futures. Micah is trying to persuade his Judean audience, and us as well, that God is the only one who sovereignly determines all coming events. So we must realize our complete dependence on him. We have got to look to him only for hope for the future. There is never room for human pride over what we are going to do to help bring in the Kingdom of God.

The future purification of Zion

The final paragraph anticipates severity—God’s severe, purging mercy in dealing with sin in the people of Israel. He has to prepare them for a new life in the Messianic Kingdom. He has to cleanse them of sin and of all false sources of dependence. Anything other than God himself has to be purged from the life of his people. Verses 10-15 describe this purification process:

**“And it will be in that day,” declares the LORD,
“That I will cut off your horses from among you
And destroy your chariots.
I will also cut off the cities of your land
And tear down all your fortifications.
I will cut off sorceries from your hand,
And you will have fortunetellers no more.
I will cut off your carved images
And your sacred pillars from among you,
So that you will no longer bow down
To the work of your hands.
I will root out your Asherim from among you
And destroy your cities.
And I will execute vengeance in anger and wrath
On the nations which have not obeyed.”** (Micah 5:10-15)

That is a word of warning, that at the end of time, after centuries and centuries of rejection, disobedience, disavowal of God and his redeemer, judgment will come inexorably. When you think back to Micah’s day, both Israel and Judah were guilty of sins that violated God’s law. They grieved his heart. Time after time he had sent messengers to the people to denounce sin, call for repentance and warn that judgment was coming. But the people wouldn’t listen. In spite of that, Micah promises that in that day Israel will return to the land. The state of Israel was founded in 1948 as a Jewish homeland for expatriates from all parts of the world, but Jews have begun to return to that land in unbelief. Israel is still practicing the sins that keep her from God. Micah 5:10-15 tells us that God will deal with that sin. He will purge that land. He will prepare them for a new life in the Millennial Kingdom. The good news is that, as part of that process, they will recognize their Messiah. They will repent of sin and put their trust in him.

They will be saved from the power of that sin. The prophet Zechariah foresees that coming day. He writes,

I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and of supplication, so that they will look on Me whom they have pierced. (Zechariah 12:10)

They’ll finally see Jesus whom they crucified. They’ll finally know who he is and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only son, weeping bitterly over him as over a first-born. And in that day, a fountain will be open for the house of David and for the inhabitants of Jerusalem to cleanse the sin of this stubborn and rebellious people. As a result of that cleansing, all of the false political and military hopes will be purged away. God won’t just destroy the defenses. Israel today takes such incredible pride in her military might. God will destroy it because he wants his people to trust *him* as their military leader. Their false religious hopes, religious fanaticism, and trust in

traditions that are dead and gone will all be purged away. He'll get rid of all of that because he wants them to trust him as the living God.

Finally, in verse 15, disobedience to God will be purged. Only people who listen to God, love him and respond to him, will escape judgment. Israel will finally understand that hope is found only in him. She'll repent of sin, seek to please God, obey him, and she won't imitate the sins of all the other nations around her—the nations who will end up under the wrath and judgment of God. In his commentary on Micah, Lesley Allen summarizes this last paragraph in these words,

Micah issues a clarion call to Israel for true faith in their God, the faith that transcends nationalism, addiction to religion, and to the metaphysical. A faith that is grounded in the revelation of God's character and God's will. (2)

Our response

In conclusion, there are two important things for us to understand and embrace. The first concerns how we view the nation of Israel; the second, how we look at ourselves in response to this.

Regarding the nation of Israel, God has not rejected his people. Paul writes this in Romans 11,

I say then, God has not rejected his people, has He? May it never be! For I too am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. God has not rejected His people whom He foreknew. (Romans 11:1-2)

God has not replaced the nation Israel with the church. He still has a purpose and plan for his people. And he has begun the process of gathering the unbelieving Jewish nation to their land along with a remnant of faithful Jews. In God's timing, they will experience a purification of suffering, as Scripture calls it, and then Messiah will be revealed to them and he will give birth to a new nation. Micah foresaw that day and tried to communicate this to his people, but they wouldn't listen.

For us, as followers of Jesus Christ, we can rejoice in the fact that he is our King and our Shepherd, and he offers peace to anyone, any time, who will come to him. Remember he said, "Come to Me, all who are weary [burdened with sin], and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart; and YOU SHALL FIND REST FOR YOUR SOULS. For My yoke is easy, and My load is light" (Matthew 11:28-30). That invitation is always open from the Prince of Peace.

We know as well that Christ is going to come back to gather his people to himself and establish his righteous kingdom of which we will be a part. The apostle Peter talks about Christ's return: "The day of the Lord will come like a thief." In light of that reality, Peter then asks, "What sort of persons ought you to be?" (2 Peter 3:10, 11). As we anticipate the future, we should live lives of holiness and godliness, waiting and earnestly desiring the coming of the day of the Lord. Hope is powerfully motivational in how we live life in our community, serving people around us, extending the work of the Kingdom. Future hope produces in us what Peter calls "present godliness," commitment to righteous living.

Micah is still speaking today. He is trying to communicate this message of future hope, but most of the nation, the people around us, aren't listening.

Also found in the *New York Times* article, Robert Wuthnow, Director for the Center for the Study of Religion at Princeton University, addressed the issue of church attendance, which has not really changed, even in the aftermath of the September 11. He talks about a dichotomy: we see ourselves as a religious nation with spiritual sensitivities, but he says we are really more secular than spiritual.

We are in some ways a very religious country, especially compared to Western Europe, but we are of two minds. The other mind is that we really are pretty secular. We are very much a country of consumers and shoppers and we are quite materialistic. And as long as we can kind of paste together a sense of control through our ordinary work and our ordinary purchases, we are pretty happy to do that.

George Barna, who is head of Barna Research Group, takes polls and measures spiritual involvement and how people put faith into practice. In a poll conducted after September 11, Barna found no change in the number of people who said they had prayed to God, read the Bible, participated in a small prayer group, volunteered at a church, or made time for personal prayer or meditation.

Even the number of those who said religious faith is very important in their lives stayed the same. Barna says, “I think it confirms that for the most part we take faith for granted, and we turn to religion in times of crisis. But after the immediate crisis passes, so does our flirtation with any kind of deeper faith.”

We are not that different as a nation from the people of Micah’s Judah, are we? We don’t have to be that way. Any one of us can turn to the Lord and ask him to forgive sin. We can ask him to deepen our faith, strengthen our faith, cleanse us of superficiality and taking things for granted in relationship to him. All we have to do is “turn.” That is the powerful Old Testament word which means “turn around and repent.”

Hosea issued a beautiful invitation to repent: “Come, let us return to the LORD. For He has torn us, but He will heal us; He has wounded us, but He will bandage us. He will revive us...He will raise us up....” And, for what purpose? “That we may live before Him” (Hosea 6:1-2).

In light of that, let us press on to know the Lord, to live lives of purpose in service to him.

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NOTES:

1) “A NATION CHALLENGED: RELIGION; As Attacks’ Impact Recedes, A Return to Religion as Usual,” *New York Times*, 26 November 2001.

2) Lesley Allen, *The Book of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah and Micah*. New International Commentary of the Old Testament (NICOT). © 1976. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids MI. P. 361

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