

Message of Warning, Message of Hope

Micah 4:1-13; Focus on 6-13.

In the New Testament Jesus speaks of a kingdom where love, respect, and peace are the norms. It is clear that Micah, too, looks toward a future when there will be no war and neighbors will share their shade trees with no fear. A time without war and hostility between nations and neighbors can only be realized under the rule of the Prince of Peace.

When we look around us and listen to Micah's descriptions of what was going wrong back in his time – it reminds us of what we see today. And with our technology – we can see events almost immediately. This includes false news.

Back in 1970, Billy Graham wrote in a New York Times article, When is Christ Coming?; The Twenty Signs of the Bible Give us a Clue. I don't see a list of 20 signs but think it's worth paying attention to this because of how he categorizes signs to look for. I think he would say things are both worse and better today.

Billy Graham's article: When is Christ Coming?; The Twenty Signs of the Bible Give us a Clue.

Here is some of what he wrote. "Millions of Americans (we could add Canadians & people around the world) are caught up in a desperate attempt to know the future. The phenomenal rise in the sale of crystal balls, Ouija boards and Viennese fortune-telling tarot cards is only a part of the new "groping" into the future.

Graham continues, "I met with Walter Reuther, an American labor leader, who said, "Science could bring paradise to earth by the year 2000."

Billy Graham replied, "There is one flaw. No one has fed into the computers the facts about people's moral weakness, our tendency toward hate, lust, greed that produce racism, crime, war and a thousand other evils." An important observation!

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"The predictions of future events occupy approximately one quarter of all the Bible: The teaching of the Second Coming of Jesus Christ is dealt with in some 1,800 passages in the Bible. Over 318 of these are in the NT. (This statistic seems a little high to me. But it does point out the Bible's warns us about Jesus' return – often!)

Graham goes on, "The prophecies of the Bible do not predict a world of gradual progress toward a materialistic paradise. They see a world torn by lawlessness, war, famines, and pestilences on a scale that only God himself can terminate if the human race is to survive.

"Throughout the Bible the phrase "the last days" or "that day" or "the day" or "the day of the Lord" is used, indicating in most places an "X" period in history when dramatic events will take place. These events will culminate in God's intervention and the literal return of Jesus Christ to this planet.

"The Bible does not teach that the earth or the human race will come to an end. Instead, the Bible teaches that the world will be renovated by fire. This fire will destroy all that is evil and prepare the earth for the Kingdom of God.

Graham wrote, "It will be a Kingdom that will bring about the "new social order." There will be the abolition of social injustice, poverty, (greed) war, disease, and racism.

He continued, "The disciples asked Jesus, "Tell us, when shall these things be? What shall be the sign of your coming, and of the end of the world?"

Graham's categories of signs: Mental state of the world. Moral state of the world. Wars and Rumors of Wars. There is lots of talk about peace. The Gospel will be preached all over the world.

In reply Jesus characterized the mental state of the world just before His return. He said there would be “upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity” (Luke 21:25). To be distressed is to be under pressure; perplexity means bewilderment. Jesus said the generation before His return would be under such severe pressure from every point of view there would be no apparent way out.

“Another example, or sign, has to do with the moral state of the world.” We each could go into great detail. Plus, we have Micah’s accusations about what was going on in Israel.

Graham’s article says, Jesus’ prediction about war would be another sign. “And ye shall hear of wars and rumors of wars. For nation shall rise against nation” (Mt 24:67). The Bible indicates towards the end of the age, wars will be more widespread, more devastating, and more frequent. These wars will all culminate in “the battle of Armageddon.”

“And then there is the great emphasis on the word “peace.” The Apostle Paul said, “For when they shall say, Peace & safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape.” (I Thess. 5:3). All our talk about peace today seems so fruitless.

“Another category, Billy Graham gives of the end times coming, is Jesus said, “And this Gospel of the Kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come” (Matthew 24:14). Today by mass media and the printed page the Gospel is being proclaimed around the world.

Why do I share this article from Billy Graham? It is because we have a fascination with end times prophecy. It is to point out, that it is not just the Old Testament prophets we should listen to, but Jesus talked about the end times, often. So, what does Micah have to say to us today?

Verse 6 starts off with, “*In that day.*” This is an echo of verse 1 of chapter 4, where Micah describes a beautiful picture of what will occur. It is a messianic term. But here the focus is on the nation and people of Israel. Chapters 1 to 3 has shared what and why Israel will be judged and punished. Here is where their hope lies.

Micah describes the regathered people as lame, as exiles, those brought to grief and as driven away. Their weakness as a people will at some time in the future be over. From their scattered places, God the Almighty will bring them back. We need to note at least two things. First, it is God who has caused the people to be lame, taken into exile, & to be afflicted. Second the emphasis is Yahweh brings the people back together - not some human leader & some form of government.

In **Verse 7** is the promise they will become a strong nation again with the Lord ruling over them in Mount Zion – *from that day & forever*, like the NT promises. God will bring them together in the Creator’s power. What a promise of grace.

They got into their situation because the results of their sins afflicted them. But Micah says, God has not forgotten them. Instead, he will restore them. It is a message of hope after the over whelming list of leadership wrongs and their infidelity. Here is an example of OT grace.

(Verse 8.) This had to be good news to the original listeners. Micah finally and again, offers a message of hope for Israel. Even though they have brought on themselves pain and suffering, they will find the grace of God. The language in these verses is full of allusions back to Israel’s united kingdom. The language also reflects some shepherd images. The people hearing this are hearing meanings far beyond the actual words. The message is the new kingdom will far outshine Israel’s most glorious past with King’s David and Solomon. Yahweh will be the king – not a person.

But in the background of this message from Micah, is the same message the prophet **Hosea** gave in chapter **5, verse 15**. Speaking for God he says, “Then I will return to my lair, until they have borne their guilt and seek my face - in their misery they will earnestly seek me.”

Isn't this human nature? It seems God works on us up to a point & then he seemingly retreats, until we go to him. There is an old joke about men not asking for direction. But this observation fits all people. We do our own thing and then when we need help, we turn to anything but our Savior and the ways of living he teaches.

We talk of “hitting bottom,” but smart people do not hit bottom. Instead, they seek help, change, and turn around, before the bottom. But in God's grace, God is always near by, waiting on us to turn to him and live out his ways. It is too bad that we are so often so slow to do this. We love to be stubborn in our own wisdom.

But here Micah prophecies that there will be a glorious, restored reunion of the remnant, the divided kingdom with people scattered, with a new forever king, on the mountain of the Lord, with God watching out for everyone. Micah is speaking to an audience what they want to hear. But he goes beyond what we can dream.

As one rabbi put it, “the Torah – the law, the Promised Land, and the Chosen people – this is the trinity of Israel's faith and history.” But we know God's vision is way beyond this.

(Verse 6) To help us catch the sense of these verses, let's look at them again. Verses 6 and 7 talk about restoring the people of Israel. Verse 8 focuses on restoring the city of Jerusalem, the capital, the center of government and faith.

(Verse 7) There is the idea of a shepherd and sheep. There is the idea of kingship because the shepherds back then in the culture and in some religions, blended into the kings. Kings were ideally considered to be shepherds

because they were expected to care for their people. And there is the prominence of Jerusalem, Mount Zion.

(Verse 8) These word pictures had the purpose of giving the people hope in the miserable living conditions and threats of the empires around them, that they were experiencing, with the promise of strength to come. And for the humiliation which they were undergoing as God's people, because of their sins and their broken corrupt kingdom and religion. But they are promised an ultimate divine glory, by the very Creator they rebelled against!

Let's briefly recap. Micah chapters 1-3 mostly describe the sins of the people, the leaders, and their judgment. Then in Micah 4, verses 1-5, we have this incredible message of hope for the whole world. In verses 6-8, the message of hope becomes specific for the people & nation of Israel – despite their rebellion against God. This is the rescue for the remnant and Zion.

Then **verses 9** to 10 describe their distress and their deliverance. There is a graphic shift from the future glory of Jerusalem to the realities of the current crises. Micah did not just condemn and then point to pie in the sky. He names the pain that people are going through – right now.

Verse 9 in Hebrew begins with the word, “*now*.” Using this word in a context like this often means, “at this time.” Micah is making the point that despite what he has just said, he tells his readers to not have a false sense of security. These rhetorical sarcastic questions about not having a king and counselor means the people have no viable government, as Micah has previously described.

Micah is warning Judah they will experience what they have brought on themselves. That's why they will cry aloud. He is predicting exile. Then he uses a familiar biblical theme of the pain of a woman in labor. Remember, as far as we know – there were no drugs available back then like we have today. So, the picture is a nation in complete agony, like a woman in

labor. That is not a pleasant image. But labor pains bring new life. And that is the promise. The pain of Israel will give way to joy – to new birth.

Verse 10. But it is important to notice Micah is predicting the people will be taken to Babylon – not the current power – Assyria. How did he know that? Well, God told him. He describes it in detailed stages like it will occur. *“Leave the city. Camp in the field. Go to Babylon.”* But then good news! *“You will be rescued. God will redeem you. He will take you away from your enemies.”* And that is what occurred. It is kind of like a second Exodus from Egypt.

I think this means we must have a lot of faith in how God works. The bad news is the exile is coming because of sin. But that is exactly when deliverance will begin. Babylon is a metaphor, a sign of God’s anger. However, it is the first restorative step of his people from their sin. But it may take some time, some generations.

Micah was describing how God often works. This is in total contrast to our hopes & expectations of quick results when we pray for help. So, we need to learn to look forward with persistent hope. Romans 12, verse 12 urges us, *“Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.”*

And we are familiar with this verse from Isaiah 40:31. *“Those who wait for the LORD will gain new strength; They will mount up with wings like eagles, They will run and not get tired, They will walk and not become weary.”* Waiting for the Lord means persisting in righteousness until we receive His answer or His deliverance. So, we need to also have the long view of hope.

An important word in verse 10 is the last word. The word is, *“enemies,”* plural. The next verse talks about *“nations.”* Micah seems to be saying God’s people would come under the domination of a variety of godless nations, until

“the Daughter of Zion will break the nations to pieces.”

(Verse 11) We are told the nations would exhibit hostility in their ignorance, for they gloat over the misfortune of God’s people, because they do not know they are part of God’s plan for his people. Here we have another case of *“you meant it for evil, God meant it for good.”* They sought to destroy Israel, but God was using them rather to punish and purify his people and would punish these nations most severely in due time for doing his will with all the wrong intentions.

Verses 11 to 13 describe from siege to victory, or we could say, rescue to triumph. So, if you want a date for the end times, Jesus’ second coming, note that even after Babylon is in power, there will be other enemies. So much of the language here is in the future tense.

(Verse 12) The message seems to be, the nations over time, are assembled against God’s people. They express hatred and taunts toward them. They are ready to make destruction. They work hard to humiliate God’s people. A simple example of this is, in some places when people were hanged in North America, crowds showed up to taunt, insult and enjoy the hanging. That is what occurred when Jesus was tried and when he hung on the cross. People can be so mean and cruel. Groups of people can get caught up in unkind behavior.

Some say that Christians are being persecuted as much if not more than ever before around the world. And it is not all with violence. One of the problems some pastors in Vietnam face is, they get arrested for nonsense, and then get released when they pay a bribe to the local authority. Nothing about this is legal. But they get targeted since Christians are automatically suspect and fair game. It’s hard to feed your family or gather funds for church projects with this kind of persecution.

We need to notice these sections that have *“now,”* in them, in Hebrew, verses 9, 11, &

then chapter 5, verse 1 for next week. Because they end with the assertion that the present or anticipated bad situation will be changed for the better. That is why we can give them the labels of distress to deliverance, from siege to victory, and next week, from helpless ruler to ideal king.

(Verse 13) We have the assurance Almighty God will win out. But it may be over the long term. Instead of having the upper hand, the nations are the ones being threshed on the threshing floor. Zion, Israel, the church, with horns of iron and hoofs of bronze, at some point, will break the nations into many pieces. Sounds fairly militant and violent, doesn't it? Here the mood changes into vengeance. There is a little savagery in all of us – even for Micah. I am not surprised this has slipped into the prophecy. Is it from God?

But also, we need to understand what is being said here. People who think they are opposing God, find that they really are doing God's will. This is easy to say but harder to really believe – especially when we are facing difficulties and want rescue now! But in the meantime – what about people who are suffering? And we know Jesus sets a high & different standard of response – love your enemies. Do good to those who persecute you. That is the response that overcomes evil.

To cap this prediction, God's people will devote the stolen riches, the ill-gotten gains of their enemies – to the Lord. And as often occurs in the Hebrew language, it is said again, *“their wealth to the Lord of all the earth.”*

The importance of God's prophets is we learn a remnant theology and living.

Especially in these times of incredibly sad church failures; rejection of the church and its morals by society; and the practical and theological drift of the church itself. As G. K. Chesterton most memorably put it: “Five times the church has gone to the dogs and every time it was the dog that died.” The Lord has a plan the world does not know, and part of that plan

is always the preservation of the remnant among the nations that will receive his judgment, until finally that remnant will be vindicated before the sight of the entire world. "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,"

The importance of God's prophets is also, not that we find an accurate prediction of the end times. Instead, what we get is an outlook on life that helps us hold fast to our confession, to remain faithful to the full Word of God, no matter it's mysteries, or when the world holds us in scorn. God's prophets teach us to be a faithful confident remnant, in the face of opposition. To be calm, peaceful, patient, humble, and cheerful even in desperate situations. The role of prophets is to urge us to have courage and steadiness in the fact, Jesus is Lord of history, of time, of us and over all.