

This Man Shall Be the Peace

"Thou wilt perform the truth to Jacob, and the mercy to Abraham, which Thou hast sworn unto our fathers from the days of old"—Micah 7:20

THE PROPHECY OF MICAH

WE are reading together the prophecy of Micah. Why do we read these things?—this book written nearly 3000 years ago about the sins and calamities of people of a different age, long since dead: sins which we are not likely to be in a position to commit—idolatry, oppression of the poor, witchcraft, physical violence against our neighbors?

These things sometimes seem repetitious, and irrelevant, and monotonous. What value and interest do they have for us in this so "enlightened" and exciting 20th century A.D.?

We read these things because they are the eternal Word of God to man—the one tangible thing we can hold in our hands that connects US to eternity.

We read them because these things are written for our admonition, our instruction, our training and development in godliness. The sins may be different, but the basic struggle is the same—the struggle against the deceptiveness and stupidity of our natural flesh that wants to take us down the glittering path of death—that wants us to cast aside the joys of eternity for the silly, passing, exciting, half-pleasures of the present, that always leave us unhappy and unsatisfied and craving for more.

We read these things to fill our minds and hearts and thoughts with the wholesome and pure and exalted things of the Spirit, and thus to become spiritually-minded, which is life and peace—and to clear out of our minds all the natural little pots and pans rubbish of the passing present. Pots and pans have their place—an essential place—but a very, very SMALL place in the spiritual mind.

We read these things that, through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures, we might have hope—hope and joy in a hopeless and joyless world. The world has excitement. It has brief gratification. It has many silly and childish activities that it quaintly and rather pathetically calls "pleasures"—like beating some object back and forth with a stick. It calls these things pleasures because it does not know or comprehend what REAL joy and pleasure and satisfaction actually is. It uses just the little, bottom, animal part of its brain.

We read these things because this is our one precious lifeline of Light to keep us from sinking in the dark, dead ocean of the world.

CHAPTER ONE

Micah 1:1—Micah prophesied in the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, some time in the 50 years between 750 and 700 BC—nearly 3000 years ago, half way back to Adam. He prophesied concerning Samaria and Jerusalem: Israel and Judah.

Millions, yea, billions of people have come and gone since the days of Micah. All are forever perished and forgotten, but he remains with us in the eternal record. Why?

Because, in his brief passing day, he had the wisdom to cast off the world and cast in his lot faithfully and wholeheartedly with the things of eternity; while they—the forgotten billions—chased the infantile "pleasures" of the present.

Jotham and Hezekiah were good kings—two of the best. Ahaz—in between—son of Jotham and father of Hezekiah, was one of the most wicked and corrupt.

Jotham is a strange and shadowy figure. He did right before God; nothing adverse is recorded concerning him; he was a great builder—he "built cities and castles and towers." He was a great conqueror. He became mighty, it is recorded, because he "prepared his ways before the Lord his God." But so little is recorded concerning him—no personal details at all (2 Kings 15:32-38; 2 Chron. 27).

Though he was personally among the best of the kings, we are told that in his reign "the people did yet corruptly" (2 Chron. 27:2). This is the sad key to many things—

"The people did yet corruptly."

How unnecessarily sad! That the people, blessed with so many blessings—shown the way of wisdom—should be so stupid! They did not think they were corrupt. They were offended at the suggestion. "What do we do wrong?" they often said, as reported by the prophets. They just acted naturally, like natural people, and everything they did seemed perfectly all right to them. But everything outside the narrow spiritual way of life is corruption and death.

Hosea and Isaiah were already prophesying when Micah began in the reign of Jotham. They had been prophesying since the previous reign of Uzziah, Jotham's father. Amos had been, too, but his ministry was now ended. It was a period of crisis, and of great prophetic activity. The end of Israel's kingdom was at hand, and Judah came perilously close to destruction also, but was saved by Hezekiah's faith.

We learn from Jer. 26 that Micah was very instrumental in helping to bring about the reforms under Hezekiah which temporarily saved Judah from annihilation. It is Micah's ch. 3 that Jeremiah mentions as influencing the people of Judah—

"Therefore shall Zion for your sake be plowed as a field, and Jerusalem shall become heaps" (v. 12).

800 years later, in its final desolation under Titus, Zion actually and literally was ceremoniously plowed by the Roman soldiers, as a mark and symbol of its complete and permanent destruction. And when the walls were later rebuilt, the city moved northward and the original hill of Zion was left outside, so that ever since it has remained open fields—current aerial photographs still show it so.

There are two great lessons in Micah for us—as timely today as the day they were written—a lesson of warning and a lesson of hope.

1:—Sin WILL be punished. There is no outwitting or out-maneuvering God. He has said, very simply and clearly, that obedience and spirituality will bring happiness and life; disobedience and fleshliness will bring sorrow and death.

It is so very simple and very conclusive, so tragically confirmed by all human history, especially Israel's; yet so few seem to get the point. Most allow themselves to be deceived by the subtlety of the flesh, and feel that they can, in their own special case, please the flesh and still have God's treasures.

Why are "intelligent" people who should know better SO stupid about this one thing—the most important of all? Because they don't make the EFFORT—they don't see the NECESSITY—of getting these prophecies, this Word of God, sharply enough into their minds and consciousness—

"Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God."
—and Faith is the one thing we've got to have more of than anything else if we are to have any hope of overcoming. Faith is the wisdom and the power to put first things FIRST, and keep them there.

And 2:— The glorious end of all things WILL be accomplished, and all present things, good and bad are working toward that end. As we stand back and view the great sweep of history, and as— with the slow passage of time—these once terrible calamities fall into their proper perspective in the plan of God, we are assured, and we realize, that all is for a wise purpose.

The people of God suffer and struggle now for their own good and training. The wicked prosper because they do not matter. This is their passing day. Let them have it to the full. The Assyrians prospered while Israel suffered. The Assyrians are gone forever, but Israel continues still.

"Thou wilt perform the Truth to Jacob, and the mercy to Abraham which thou hast sworn unto our fathers from the days of old."

The nation of Israel and its long history is the type of each individual. Here on a vast scale written across the pages of history, God manifests and reveals His way with those who are called

according to His purpose: trying, disciplining, developing, sometimes terribly punishing, but finally—for the true remnant that endures all in faith—blessing and purifying and perfecting.

V.2: "Hear all people". This call is for us. We do well to give heed. It is said that those who ignore the mistakes of the past are doomed to repeat them.

Vs. 3-4: The Lord cometh forth in terrible judgment, melting the mountains and tearing the valleys. It is a symbol of tremendous destruction and upheaval. Israel's world was coming to a violent end, and soon the scene will be repeated on a worldwide scale. Only those who in wisdom have chosen the merciful chambers of the Lord will escape.

Vs. 6-7: Samaria shall be utterly destroyed. And so it was, soon after. After the bitter sufferings of a 3-year siege, its inhabitants were driven away in chained, naked gangs as slaves. These were just ordinary people, doing ordinary things, pleasing themselves, ignoring God's commands.

The rest of the chapter is the similar coming judgment on Judah. Judah witnessed Samaria's dreadful end, but heeded not the lesson.

CHAPTER TWO

Ch. 2:1-2: Injustice in Judah. Though they were all the chosen children and close family of God, they oppressed and abused one another. Civil war is always the bitterest war. The closer the relationship, the deeper the feeling—either for good or for ill. Most murders are in the family.

We must be careful of this among ourselves. We are the family of God, very closely knit together. Our closeness must be for good, and for comfort, and for patience, and for strength—never for bitterness or antagonism.

We tend to take our own people for granted, and to let our feelings and actions run free with a harshness and rudeness we'd never show to strangers. The only preventative of this is ever-increasing kindness and love in the spirit.

Vs. 3-5: They would be utterly spoiled and lose all their heart-set worldly possessions; and so it later came to pass.

V. 6: "Don't prophesy to us!" Mind your own business and don't tell us how to run our private lives! So the stupidity of the flesh has always reacted to exhortation.

V. 7: Are your calamities because God's power to help you is limited? Or because He does not care? Doesn't God's Word always bring true peace of mind and happiness to those who obey it? Show a case where it is otherwise!

Vs. 8-9: It is their own wickedness that brings their trouble.

V. 10: The ultimatum: "Your opportunity has passed! Get out! Go into captivity. The land is polluted." They could not recognize the pollution, because it must be spiritually discerned by the Light of the Word of God.

V. 11: They want no prophets except those false ones who will flatter them and preach prosperity.

Vs. 12-13: A joyful, merciful break in a message of gloom. The final deliverance and regathering—gathered together as scattered sheep.

The "Breaker" is come to them. Another strange and significant expression. Christ is the Breaker—to break open the gates of death; to break through their enemies; to break the barriers of their captivity; and above all, to break them and their fleshly spirit, so they may be acceptable to God.

V. 13: "Their King shall pass before them, and the Lord on the head of them."

CHAPTER THREE

Ch. 3:1-3: Those commissioned to administer the Law of Moses did not themselves obey that Law. How typical! This is a universal failing.

We so easily fall into the same pattern. So quick to criticize and apply the Law of Christ to the sins of others. So slow and so blind to see its deep and searching application to every activity of our own lives. If we judged ourselves as eagerly as we judge others, what a loving, wonderful, spiritual, unearthly community we would be!

We would be at all the meetings, instead of seeking our ease elsewhere. We would put aside everything of the world, everything of our own pleasures; and every thought and moment would be consecrated to the service of God in love! Let us take care of the INNER part first, so we may stand some chance at the judgment seat of Christ.

"Let him that is without sin cast the first stone."

Truly none are completely sinless, but we are sinless in God's sight if we are covered by Christ, and if we strive to put away all the things of the world.

But if we are willing to condone and justify in ourselves any worldly activity or affiliation, for pleasure or for profit, then we are blind hypocrites when we condemn others.

V. 4: *"They shall cry unto the Lord, but He will not hear them."*

We assume that, when we have had enough of the flesh and the world, we can just run back to God at any time and He will be happy to receive and take care of us.

Truly He is infinitely merciful, and He extended mercy and patience to Israel time after time. For this we can be thankful. But any beforehand, calculated presumption upon His mercy is the utmost of folly, and doomed to sorrow. God is not mocked—"As a man soweth; so shall he reap."

Vs. 6-7: *"Night shall be unto you . . . The sun shall go down over the prophets . . . There is no answer of God."*

The ministry of the prophets was one of God's greatest blessings to Israel. Here were inspired men of God, living right among them, whom they could follow and be safe. But they always sought false prophets and persecuted those who told them the Truth.

At last, 300 years after Micah, in the days of Malachi, the prophetic ministry ceased. It shone brilliantly and briefly 400 years later in John, Jesus and the apostles, then went out again, and left Israel and the world to 2000 years of darkness and evil Gentile night.

V. 8: *"But truly (says Micah) I am full of power by the Spirit of the Lord, and of judgment, and of might, to declare unto Jacob his transgression and to Israel his sin."*

A very powerful verse. A verse for us to consider deeply. We have the words of the prophets—let us heed them.

Vs. 9-11: The heads and rulers abhor judgment and pervert equity, the priests teach for hire, and the prophets divine for money.

This (we remember from the words of Jeremiah) was in the days of the good king Hezekiah, for this was the very prophecy of Micah to which Jeremiah refers. How could this be in Hezekiah's day?

It gives us a revealing picture of the entrenched and deep-rooted corruption in high places with which Hezekiah had to contend—of the largely single-handed battle he fought.

V.12: *"Therefore shall Zion be plowed as field."*

And it HAS been—for 2000 years.

CHAPTER FOUR

Ch. 4:1 "But—. Here is a change. A complete reversal from desolation to world dominion—

"BUT in the LAST DAYS, the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established in the top of the mountains.

"And many nations shall say, Come and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord.

"And the Law shall go forth of Zion, and the Word of the Lord from Jerusalem."

No more corruption and confusion as at present under man's evil rule, but one universal law of righteousness.

V. 3: "*Nation shall not lift up a sword against nation.*"

What a glorious change from man's evil history! War has always been his principal occupation. Again just yesterday (Dec. 4, 1971), 2 large nations went to war, as all nations continually have, like vicious animals. And yet man makes such pious and pompous pretensions of being mature and civilized.

V. 4: "*They shall sit every man under his vine and his fig tree, and none shall make them afraid.*"

Again, what a tremendous contrast to the evil present, with crime and violence doubling every 5 to 10 years, and getting closer and closer to all of us! How unerringly the prophetic Spirit of God puts its finger on the outstanding evils of these latter days of proud man's glorious civilization—war and violence, oppression, injustice and corruption. The US news media are constantly reporting police and political corruption on a larger and larger scale, reaching into the highest places; and this is one of the world's supposedly more just and advanced and democratic societies.

It is very interesting that these verses appear almost word for word in Isa. 2. Isaiah was contemporary with Micah, and very active in the affairs of Hezekiah. Clearly this double witness is to focus our attention on this remarkable prophecy of the glorious coming reign of Christ.

Vs. 6-8: "*In THAT DAY will I assemble her that halteth . . . And make her a strong nation, and the Lord shall reign over them in Mt. Zion for ever . . . And the Kingdom shall come to the daughter of Jerusalem.*"

Truly a glorious destiny for Israel, the people of God, after all their travail has passed away! But in the meantime a long night of sorrow lay before them—

V. 10: "*Thou shalt go even to Babylon.*"

Assyria was the then-current world power and oppressor, and Babylon at this time was of no power. But both Micah and Isaiah point to Babylon as the destined oppressor and destroyer of Judah, as Assyria was to be of Israel.

"*There the Lord shall redeem thee.*"

Deliverance from Babylon should come in its time. Deliverance did come in 70 years from literal Babylon, but Judah was again carried captive centuries later into the much more terrible Babylon of universal Rome, where it is still scattered and oppressed unto this day.

V. 11: "*Now also many nations are gathered against thee that say, Let her be defiled, and let our eye look upon Zion.*"

How strange and how wonderful that today, 2700 years later, we see these same nations surrounding Israel, barking like mad dogs, still seeking her destruction and backed up in their evil enterprise by Russia and the Papacy; for the Pope has never recognized Israel's existence, but has visited and fawned on her Arab enemies.

V. 12: "*But they know not the thoughts of the Lord . . . for He shall gather them as the sheaves into the floor.*"

Here is Armageddon—the gathering of Gog and the False Prophet of Rome and their bands for destruction on the mountains of Israel

V. 13: *"Arise and thresh, O daughter of Zion, for I will make thine horn iron and thy hooves brass, and thou shalt beat in pieces many people, and I will consecrate their gain unto the Lord."*

This has never yet occurred. This is the "Great Day of God Almighty." How wonderfully we see things shaping up today before our eyes for this long-foretold and now soon-coming climax!

CHAPTER FIVE

Ch. 5 contains Micah's best-known prophecy: the vital item of information concerning the Messiah that Micah alone was privileged to supply—

V. 2: *"But thou, Bethlehem-Ephratah, though thou be little among the 1000's of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto Me that is to be ruler in Israel."*

This was the prophecy to which the chief priests and scribes immediately pointed when Herod asked them where the Messiah should be born. They took the prophecy simply and literally, and of direct divine origin, and they were sure of their ground—and they were absolutely right. Even so will the other prophecies be just as literally and surely fulfilled.

In v. 5 is another well-known and important prophecy—

"This man shall be the peace when the Assyrian shall come into our land."

We see the vicious Assyrian today, like the Assyrian of old, gathering his forces to carry out his evil thought against Israel, and blasphemously defying Israel's God.

"This man shall be the peace." Not just give peace, but BE peace. Christ IS peace. There is no peace outside of him and we seek it in vain when we seek it anywhere else. But how long it takes foolish man to learn this so simple and easy lesson!—

"GREAT peace have they that love Thy law."

"There is NO peace, saith my God, to the wicked."

"Thou wilt keep him in PERFECT peace whose mind is stayed on Thee."

Israel never learned—shall we be so foolish, too?

"Then shall we raise against him 7 shepherds and 8 principal men."

Seven is completeness and perfection. Eight is a new beginning. Does this refer to a particular 15 men? Bro. Thomas suggests Christ plus the 14 (double 7) who dominate the New Testament picture: John the Baptist, Paul, and the 12 apostles.

Vs. 7 and 8 are a striking contrast, but they are harmonious parts of the whole—

"The remnant of Judah shall be as a dew from the Lord, as showers upon the grass."

"The remnant of Jacob shall be among the Gentiles as a lion amongst sheep, who treadeth down and teareth in pieces."

These are two essential aspects of Israel's latter-day work with the nations—to discipline and to bless.

"The Kingdom shall come to the daughter of Jerusalem."

The rest of chapter 5 is the final purification of Israel itself.

There is much more of interest in this book of Micah. The next two chapters each have their well-known quotation—

CHAPTER SIX

"He hath showed thee, O man, what is good. And what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?"

"Justice, mercy and faith"—the things which Jesus calls the "weightier matters of the Law" (Matt. 23:23).

Can we honestly say that we "love mercy"—that this is our basic way of life? What does it mean, to love mercy? Let us think about that a lot. It is the key to many things—"LOVE MERCY." It will open our understanding to many things. It is a beautiful, Christ-like characteristic.

We will find that "loving mercy" is very closely related to "walking humbly"—in fact, they are inseparable, and they complement each other. They are two sides of the same godly character. "Come and see my zeal for the Lord" is often the voice of pride.

CHAPTER SEVEN

In ch. 7 there is another prophecy unique to Micah (vs. 15-16)—

"According to the days of thy coming out of the land of Egypt will I show unto him marvellous things.

"The nations shall see and be confounded at all their might."

It is this passage, in conjunction with several others, and the general fitness of things, that led bro. Thomas to the conclusion that the events of the "last days"—the transition period between the evil night of the Gentiles and the glorious day of the Lord—would consume 40 years, one generation, to purge and purify the earth.

Training must begin in early childhood. Today there is little discipline: only increasing wildness and self-will: a proud, wilful, lawless generation. A new generation must come up, taught in the wisdom of God and not the folly of the world, before the earth will be fit for Christ's Kingdom. A generation of the earth must perish in the wilderness.

Finally, the transcendent beauty of Micah's closing words (18-20):

"Who is a God like unto Thee . . ."

This is a play on Micah's own name. The full form is Micaiah, "Who is like Yah?"—

" . . . that pardoneth iniquity and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of His heritage?

"He retaineth not His anger forever, because He delighteth in mercy.

"He will turn again; He will have compassion upon us; He will subdue our iniquities" (A strange expression!).

—He WILL subdue our iniquities, if we will let Him—if we will call upon Him—if we really want our very pleasant iniquities subdued. There is no other way to peace, and we cannot do it ourselves, but we must be mature enough and have enough sense to really desire to get rid of our fleshly and worldly desires—

"And thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea."

And the final glorious assurance of the Everlasting Covenant—

"THOU WILT PERFORM THE TRUTH TO JACOB AND THE MERCY TO ABRAHAM WHICH THOU HAST SWORN UNTO OUR FATHERS FROM THE DAYS OF OLD!"

—G.V.G.
