

“Then ... But Now”

Micah 4

When we deal with the prophets inevitably we deal with prophecy. We know from history that when the prophets called out to God’s people that the Assyrians were going to come to the Northern Kingdom of Israel that they came exactly as predicted in 722 BC and took most of the people of the north away. And, we also know that when they predicted the Babylonians under Nebuchadnezzar would come and destroy Jerusalem, that they did in 586 BC and also finished taking the people of the south away (which started in 605 BC). And then when Jeremiah told the Southern Kingdom that the exile to Babylon would be for 70 years that, yes indeed they were there for 70 years and Cyrus, king of Persia (prophesied by name in Isaiah) captured Babylon in 536 and let Israel return to their land.

And we know the prophet Daniel believed those 70 years were literal when he prayed from Babylon to God just before 536 BC to fulfil His word through Jeremiah. And then Daniel received a revelation from God (Dan. 9:20-27) that just because the 70 years of captivity were complete didn’t mean God had completely forgiven Israel for their rebellion and that it would be 70 times 70 years before God would eventually purify the nation and return them to their promised land. And so God told Daniel when the Messiah would show up and be cut off (at the end of the 69th period of 7 years 9:26, crucified) – a reference Jesus clearly spoke about when He said in Luke 19 on His Palm Sunday display of His Messiahship,

⁴¹ When He approached Jerusalem, He saw the city and wept over it, ⁴² saying, “If you had known in this day, even you, the things which make for peace! But now they have been hidden from your eyes. ⁴³ For the days will come upon you when your enemies will throw up a barricade against you, and surround you and hem you in on every side, ⁴⁴ and they will level you to the ground and your children within you, and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not recognize the time of your visitation.”

And Daniel 9:26 says that there is this unknown gap of time between the 69x7 year period leading up to Jesus’ Palm Sunday appearance until the last 7 year period of tribulation mentioned in 9:27 when the antichrist has his hay day.

When it comes to past prophecy about Israel, we have no trouble believing God’s Word is completely true and He says exactly what He means. Yet when it comes to future prophecy about Israel, many Christians say ‘Well no, that wont happen like because God changed His mind and now the Church gets all those promises, which now can’t be taken literally’. Or, some say ‘Prophecy is too controversial so I will just ignore it and not read about it because I can’t be bothered to try and understand it.’ So here’s a simple test for you. Where in the Bible are we told that the Messiah will be born in Bethlehem? Micah 5. So if we can take Micah 5 as literal promises to Israel, wouldn’t it make sense that we should understand Micah 4 as literal when he prophecies about Israel’s glorious future that we refer to as the Millennium based on Rev. 20? But prophecy isn’t relevant, people say. It’s just a bunch of dates and charts. What’s the point? A good point and we’ll see the point here in Micah 4.

So as we come to Micah 4, Micah has been predicting judgment on Israel and in particular Jerusalem, because of Israel’s rebellion against God. Micah preached during the reigns of 3 kings, one of whom was Hezekiah. We believe Micah 3-5 especially were spoken when the Assyrians threatened Hezekiah in 701 BC, the details of which are recorded in Isaiah 36-39, 2 Kings and 2 Chronicles. I know I keep sounding like a broken record but don’t let chapter divisions hinder you from

understanding the context. Let's go back to Ch. 3, Micah is pronouncing the coming Babylonian judgment on Jerusalem because the leaders have ignored God. In spite of their denial (3:11), Micah clearly says Zion/Jerusalem will be plowed like a field, it will become a heap of rubble and the temple itself (v.12) will be overgrown with thickets because it too has been destroyed and abandoned, which it was in 586 BC.

Now let's put a parenthetical [However] in between 3:12 and 4:1, because now Micah offers hope. Will it always be destroyed? What about God's promises to bless His people and the world through them?

*In the last days the mountain of the LORD's temple **will be** established as chief among the mountains; it **will be** raised above the hills, and peoples **will** stream to it.*

² *Many nations **will come** and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob. **He will** teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths." The **law will go out** from Zion, the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.*

³ *He **will** judge between many peoples and **will** settle disputes for strong nations far and wide. They **will** beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation **will not** take up sword against nation, **nor will** they train for war anymore.*

⁴ *Every man **will sit** under his own vine and under his own fig tree, and no **one will** make them afraid, for the LORD Almighty has spoken. ⁵ All the nations may walk in the name of their gods; **we will** walk in the name of the LORD our God for ever and ever.*

It is very clear 4:1-8 is about the future. Did it already happen? No, these things have not happened yet, so the last days still refers to "Then", a future time. If the destruction of Jerusalem is understood literally in 3:9-12 then the obvious way to understand 4:1-9 is a literal restoration of Israel for the future. So in the future last days,

Then, the Lord will Rule from Jerusalem on this Earth **(4:1-5)**

Micah is not talking about eternity in the New Jerusalem that Rev. 21 says is perfect and comes to a newly cleansed by fire earth. Rather he's talking about the geographical Jerusalem that we know where it is and how to get to. Where you fly into Tel Aviv and take Highway 1 east until you hit Highway 60 and go south.

God promises through Micah that the temple will one day be restored and it will be the place where nations will stream to it. Really? That's what it says. Why? Jerusalem and the temple will be the place

Where people will want to come to learn God's Word (vv. 1-2)

So they'll know how to live. Why will they want to do that? Obviously as the Messiah Jesus has returned and defeated the nations and brought an end to world wide war, and they see how He rules the world, they are attracted to what He has to offer. And if you and I are constantly leaning from God's Word and showing how God's Word brings peace in us and through us, it should also attract them to God now and want to see what following Jesus is all about. The Law will come out of Zion/Jerusalem, it will be the capitol of the world with Jesus ruling from there.

What else do we know now about then? Jerusalem will be a place

Where conflicts will be divinely settled (v.3)

He, the Lord (being Jesus), will settle disputes and nations will recycle their weapons into useful instruments for work. We know he's not talking about eternity/the New Jerusalem is because there will be no weapons then. There won't be disputes then. The earthly rule of Jesus is on this earth as we know it today, where He will establish His rule so that all people will see who He is, what He has to offer and choose whether they want to follow Him. It can't be eternity because there won't be any disputes then because all sin is gone. The Millennium is a 1000 year reign of Jesus

Where peace and prosperity is the norm (v.4)

There won't be a need for military then. Wow – won't that free up the budgets of the nations! Every person under their own fig tree is a metaphor for saying people are at rest, they have what they need and since Jesus is ruling there's no fear.

Spiritually speaking, when we accept Jesus as our Saviour we are to trust Him to meet all our needs and to know He's looking after us and resting in His peace and His ability to meet our needs. This is what it means for us to put our faith in Jesus now but a day is coming in the future when Jesus will graciously meet everybody's needs. Why? Remember, the millennial rule of Jesus is not perfection, it is the fulfilment of God's promises to show how good life is when God's rule is happening. The rule of Jesus in the future on earth will be great for everyone,

Yet, no one is forced to follow Jesus (v.5; Rev. 20)

⁵ *All the nations may walk in the name of their gods; **we will** walk in the name of the LORD our God for ever and ever.*

While many will choose to follow Jesus in that day – and by the way according to Zech. 13 and Rom. 11:25 all living Israelites will follow Jesus – not all Gentiles will want to submit to Jesus. Sad but true. Jesus will not tolerate idolatry so they will worship other gods in secret. We read about this in Zech. 13:4

⁴ *“On that day every prophet will be ashamed of their prophetic vision. They will not put on a prophet's garment of hair in order to deceive. ⁵ Each will say, ‘I am not a prophet. I am a farmer; the land has been my livelihood since my youth.’ ⁶ If someone asks, ‘What are these wounds on your body?’ they will answer, ‘The wounds I was given at the house of my friends.’*

In the Millennium Jesus will graciously rule the world and show the world exactly who He is. There is an absence of war because the enemy, Satan is locked up. But the reason we know some people will still not want to submit to Jesus is what we read about in Rev. 20:7-9 when Satan is released after 1000 years.

⁷ *When the thousand years are over, Satan will be released from his prison ⁸ and will go out to deceive the nations in the four corners of the earth—Gog and Magog—and to gather them for battle. In number they are like the sand on the seashore. ⁹ They marched across the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of God's people, the city he loves. But fire came down from heaven and devoured them. ¹⁰ And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever.*

All during those 1000 years he will be building up anger and rage. And when released he assembles a vast army. Where will he get them? People who quietly rejected Jesus' rule. However, God will make a swift end of him once and for all.

What else will happen then?

Then, God Will Restore His People to Prominence **(4:6-7)**

How?

By grace (v.6)

⁶ *"In that day," declares the LORD, "I will gather the lame; I will assemble the exiles and those I have brought to grief. ⁷ I will make the lame a remnant, those driven away a strong nation. The LORD will rule over them in Mount Zion from that day and forever.*

⁸ *As for you, O watchtower of the flock, O stronghold of the Daughter of Zion, the former dominion will be restored to you; kingship will come to the Daughter of Jerusalem."*

While initially we may think he's referring to the return from exile in 536 BC, we know these things haven't happened yet. Because even today half the world's Jewish population don't live in Israel. They are still scattered throughout the world. In the future He will bring back not the proud, rich and wise but those who humbled themselves before God and accepted what His offer of salvation through Jesus, no different than people must do today. All prophets prophesied that God would save a remnant of Israelites since many will not repent of their rejection of Jesus as Messiah. God will save His people by grace just

As He promised (v.8)

The exile was not the end. The destruction of the temple and Jerusalem in 70 AD was not the end. Any current defeat of Israel is not the end. God has made promises to His people in His Word that have yet to be fulfilled and He will bring them about. When God told Jeremiah to predict these same future promises about the Kingdom from Jerusalem and the coming of Messiah, he sealed His promise with these words in Jer. 33:20,

²⁰ *"This is what the LORD says: 'If you can break my covenant with the day and my covenant with the night, so that day and night no longer come at their appointed time, ²¹ then my covenant with David my servant—and my covenant with the Levites who are priests ministering before me—can be broken and David will no longer have a descendant to reign on his throne. ²² I will make the descendants of David my servant and the Levites who minister before me as countless as the stars in the sky and as measureless as the sand on the seashore.'"*

So Micah prophesies the destruction of the temple and Jerusalem in Ch. 3 but assures the people of Israel that a future day is coming when God will restore His city, establish His Messiah on the throne where they will enjoy peace, prosperity and blessing for 1000 years as God has promised. Since in this context the focus is on Israel, we, the church, are not mentioned here but in the New Testament we find out we will be part of this helping Jesus govern the world.

That's then - in the future. What about now? Micah returns to the present in vv.9-13 in the days of Hezekiah, who are about to be surrounded by the Assyrians, and now gives them an application. How are God's people to live in the now while we're waiting for Then to happen?

BUT NOW, God's People Must Patiently Wait **(4:9-13)**

⁹ *Why do you now cry aloud— have you no king? Has your Counselor perished, that pain seizes you like that of a woman in labor?*

¹⁰ *Writhe in agony, O Daughter of Zion, like a woman in labor, for now you must leave the city to camp in the open field. You will go to Babylon; there you will be rescued. There the LORD will redeem you out of the hand of your enemies.*

At this point they still have a king, a good one – Hezekiah. So Micah rhetorically says 'Don't you have a king?' meaning, don't you have a Godly son of David on the throne right now? At that time they did and Hezekiah cried out to God and God did deliver Israel from the Assyrians in 701 BC. But in a few years they would not have a godly king when Babylon would come around and they would suffer. So while we're waiting for the future promises of God, in the present we need to

***Trusting God for present help* (vv.9-11a; 2 Pet. 3:8-9)**

Micah exhorts the people to call out to God in their difficulties. We must be patient. We must believe God's promises are always true and call out to Him for the needs we have in the present. We must not doubt the promises about Jesus' return. Look at 2 Pet. 3:8-9

⁸ *But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day.* ⁹ *The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.*

We think God is slow in keeping His promises, but He's not. God is removed from time. His delay in sending Jesus back is because He wants to see more people saved. The patience of God for Jesus' return and to bring judgment on the world is curbed by His love for the world. So while we are waiting for Jesus' return we need to share the gospel with people while they still have time.

And of course in our present difficulties we must keep

***Trusting God's sovereign plan* (v.11b-13; 2 Pet. 3:10-13)**

Why was God going to bring exile on Israel?

¹¹ *But now many nations are gathered against you. They say, "Let her be defiled, let our eyes gloat over Zion!"* ¹² *But they do not know the thoughts of the LORD; they do not understand his plan, he who gathers them like sheaves to the threshing floor.* ¹³ *"Rise and thresh, O Daughter of Zion, for I will give you horns of iron; I will give you hoofs of bronze and you will break to pieces many nations." You will devote their ill-gotten gains to the LORD, their wealth to the Lord of all the earth.*

God sent the Israelites to Babylon for 70 years to rescue them. The Babylonians were not ruthless like the Assyrians. God blessed Israel in Babylon by preserving them. And when 70 years were over and God allowed them to return we never hear of Israel worshipping other gods. Even in difficulty God is always refining us, purifying us, causing us to draw closer to Him. We must trust God's sovereign plan in our own struggles as well as world wide struggles, like a pandemic. We must believe God is doing some type of reconstructive, retributive, refining work in the world and in us that we can't see yet but will see one day in the future.

This is what God wants us to focus on in the Now while we're waiting for the Then. Let's finish back in 2 Pet. 3:10-13

¹¹ Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives ¹² as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. ¹³ But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness. ¹⁴ So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him. ¹⁵ Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation, just as our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him.

Father in heaven, we don't know how You are using this pandemic to do some rearranging in our world; leaders, situations, etc., but we want to trust Your sovereign plan for us in this. Help us not to lose hop because our hope is in You through the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. Our position in You now and in the future is secure. Help us to cry out to You for the needs that we have but not lose sight of the reason for Jesus' delay – people need the Lord. Father, maybe someone here or hearing this doesn't know Your Son Jesus. Help them understand they, like all of us can't be saved by works because we are all sinners and fall short of Your glory. It is only by faith that You forgive our sins based on what Jesus Christ did on the cross.

And this of course is what we all need to be sharing with our scared neighbours, friends and family, who are unsettled by the virus or life's circumstances and we have the message of sure hope in Jesus. Give us Holy Spirit opportunities to share the living hope in Christ. While wait look forward to When Jesus will return, help us now to be patient and trust Your plan for us and for Your world. In King Jesus' name.

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If you have any comments or questions about this message please contact us
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