

Micah (Part Two): Rest For The Restless

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Humans are driven by a restless desire for power. How did God handle a restless, unsettled leadership? Well, Micah gives the answer to this question. So, please turn to Micah and let us begin with a brief recap of my first sermon in this series.

God called Micah and gave him spiritual power to perform the responsibility he had planned for Micah, which was to warn Israel and Judah of their impending just punishment for their sins. In Micah 3:8, he writes his SPS for the book, "But truly I am full of power [Micah speaking here] by the Spirit of the Lord, and of justice and might, to declare to Jacob his transgression and to Israel his sin." So, Micah leaves his hometown to deliver a message of judgment to the princes and the people of Jerusalem. Burdened by the abusive treatment of the poor by the rich and influential, he turns his rebukes upon any who use their social and political power for personal gain. Wow, can we relate to that today.

One-third of Micah's book exposes the sins of his countrymen, another third pictures the punishment God is about to send, and the final third holds out the hope of restoration once that discipline has ended. But through it all, God's demands upon His people are clear.

Micah 6:8 He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God.

The first verse indicates that Micah prophecies in the days of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah. Their reigns lasted from about 739-686 BC. Although Micah deals primarily with Judah, he also addresses the northern kingdom of Israel and predicts the fall of Samaria. Therefore, much of his ministry took place before the Assyrian captivity of Israel.

During Micah's ministry, the kingdom of Israel continued to crumble inwardly and outwardly until it collapsed. Micah was a contemporary of Hosea in the Northern Kingdom and of Isaiah in the court of Jerusalem and Judea. Micah is the prophet of the downtrodden and exploited people of Judean society. So he prophesized during a time of great social injustice and boldly opposes those who impose their power upon the poor and the weak for selfish agendas. Corrupt rulers, false prophets, and ungodly priests all become the focus of Micah's prophetic aim. He exposes judges, who were bought by bribes and merchants who used deceptive weights.

The pollution of sin has permeated every level of society in Judah and Israel. The balance of power between leaders had broken down because of corruption and they had turned power-hungry and greedy and immoral.

Now a good feature of American government and other human governments too is what we call balance of powers. We mean by this is that our government is composed of three semi-independent branches, each of which has unique privileges, including a check on the others. The executive branch is directed by the President of the United States. It has power to originate programs, but its power here is balanced by Congress, the legislative branch, which must fund those programs. If Congress does not fund the President's programs, the programs do not come into existence. Congress has the right to make laws, but its powers are not absolute. The judicial branch, the Supreme Court, has power to declare those laws unconstitutional.

To round out the picture the President has power over the Court through his right to appoint justices. And Congress has power over the President and Supreme Court justices through its right to impeach them, if a situation warrants this action. That is how the branches of government *should* operate under the Constitution of the United States, but we are seeing a breakdown of even those balances of power.

But what if all three branches were corrupt and worked hand-in-hand to oppress the country's citizens? Sadly, to our horror, we have arrived at that point, I think, and now our government has become all but dysfunctional. In a situation like that little can be done humanly except to overthrow the

corrupt government entirely, which would probably cause a civil war. And I am certainly not advocating that, but that is the human way, that is the way of man.

You cannot help but to have been watching what is happening in America and Canada, Australia and elsewhere. The ease with which tens of millions of Americans have accepted irrational, unconstitutional, and unprecedented police-state-type restrictions on their freedoms, including even the freedom to make a living, has been, to say the least, sobering. The obsession of wanting to be safe and secure, like all religions, places ultimate value in being safe. This explains the willingness of Americans to give up their most cherished values, including liberty in the name of safety rather than in the name of God.

The desire to lead as safe a life as possible is a major factor that explains why fewer and fewer young Americans are getting married and even fewer are having children. Neither marriage nor having children is safe. Both are filled with risk. They do not believe God when He says in Psalm 127:3, "Children are a heritage from the Lord, the fruit of the womb is a reward." It is hard to imagine greater proof of the power of mass media and of the left than a normal woman celebrating her daughter's choice not to be a mother, not to make her a grandmother, because of a fear of the climate change scam.

Love and hate are thought of as the most powerful human emotions. But in considering recent events in the world, it seems that fear is the strongest emotion. You can live a safe life or you can live a full life, you cannot live both.

The situation that confronted Micah as he entered the capital city of Jerusalem was to bring the Word of God to the corrupt leadership of Judah. And though there was sin in the outlying areas of the country and among the common people in the capitol, it was nothing compared to the evil among the ruling classes whose power is primarily in the cities. Big cities have been and continue to be centers for destructive ideas and the people living in them are generally harsher and often just plain nastier. What troubled Micah and God far more was the sin of the courts, the palaces, and the Temple. All three branches of government were corrupt. Worse yet, they worked hand-in-hand.

In Micah 3, Micah addressed the sins of the leaders. The politicians got their way when the courts and the judges were paid for their destruction of justice. The prophets also benefited from this arrangement and supported the government in turn. The leaders assumed and took for granted that the Lord supported them because they were God's nation and that no disaster would come upon them because God would not let it. That was their misconception.

This is not a new theme. It was already hinted at in chapter 2 and there Micah describes people who seized property belonging to others because it is in their power to do it and they defraud a man of his home, presumably through legal means. Later, Micah mentions prophets who speak what leaders want to hear rather than what God wants them to hear. And this suggests the interlocking corruption of the nation's upper classes. Still, it is not until chapter 3 that we see the full picture.

Micah 3:1 And I said: "Hear now, O heads of Jacob, and your rulers of the house of Israel: Is it not for you to know justice?"

Of all peoples in society the ones who carry out justice or judgments should be the ones to know it the best. But that was not the case in Jerusalem.

Chapter 3 has three sections. Section one covers verses 1-4, and it concerns judges and the corruption of the courts. The second section, verses 5-8, concerns prophets who speak well for those who pay them. Section three, verses 9-12, concerns politicians who gain support from the others for money.

Now, the word that ties the chapter together is justice. Justice has departed from Judah and that accusation dominates the chapter. But the word itself is also prominent, occurring in all three sections that I just mentioned about in chapter 3: verses 1, 8, and 9. And combined these verses say, "Listen, you leaders of Jacob, you rulers of the house of Israel: Should you not know justice, you who hate good and love evil? But as for me, I am filled with power [this is Micah speaking], with the Spirit of the Lord, and with justice and might to declare to Jacob his transgression, to Israel his sin. Hear this, you leaders of the house of Jacob, you rulers of the house of Israel, who despised justice and distort all that is right."

What a powerful message he was sending to those leaders and I am sure they did not like it at all. Micah wanted to see justice triumph in Judah, but instead he saw each branch of government supporting the others and overturning justice and pulling the highest standards down.

Sections one and three both begin with similar wording. Micah 3:1 says, "Hear now, you heads of Jacob, you rulers of the house of Israel." Micah 3:9 says, "Hear this, you heads of the house of Jacob, you heads of the house of Israel." He leaves no doubt as to who he is addressing these indictments against. Micah seems to be addressing the same people in both sections. But as we read the chapter carefully, we find that he is speaking to different people or at least to the same people exercising different areas of responsibility.

In the first section or group, he is obviously referring to perversion in the courts. In contrast, in the last group, he was speaking of political perversion involving a different kind of leadership. Undoubtedly it was common to use the words leaders and rulers for administrators of justice as well as political figures. These justices were probably the leaders of houses or families. You do not have to turn there, but in Exodus 18 Moses appointed leaders from the various tribes, houses, and families to be a system of courts for minor crimes. And no doubt Judah had a similar court system that was set up originally. They probably made some adjustments since they were not following God's instructions very closely, but it was very similar to what Moses set up.

Justice is difficult to establish and maintain and even harder to define. There are innumerable cases where the guilty have gone free and the innocent have been punished. Is there justice on earth or is there no such thing as justice? Our desire for justice is one reason why we regard justices so highly. A judge should be above reproach. Sadly, we are seeing more and more judges being indicted for corruption or getting away with massive fraud in our countries today throughout the world

Micah recognized this too in Israel and Judah and he brought charges against the judges of Judah. His complaint was not that the justices were unequal to their task, nor did he fault them with the mere neglect of justice, as serious as

that would be. Micah's charge was far worse. He accused them of *perverting* justice, which is so common today. The courts had been established to protect the innocent and punish the guilty, but these men had used them to oppress the innocent and reward the guilty. For this, the judgment of God was to come. In verses 2-3 he uses one of the most piercing images in Scripture. He says that these corrupt justices are ruthless.

Micah 3:2-3 "You who hate good and love evil; who strip the skin from My people, and the flesh from their bones; who also eat the flesh of My people, flay their skin from them, break their bones, and chop them in pieces like meat for the pot, like flesh in the cauldron."

I do not know if there is a description that is any worse than that about the abuse of people. Micah is saying that these men have become cannibal-like; not necessarily cannibals as in eating people literally. But this description shows how both physically and especially spiritually or mentally, they were destroying, pulling apart these people that they were rulers of. They were feeding on those it is their responsibility to defend.

The charge is far worse than those in chapter 2. There Micah described the activity of those who took the rich robe from men who passed by, and took their pleasant homes from women, and took God's blessing, that is, their inheritance from children. Here, it is not merely a matter of taking away possessions, clothes, home, or inheritance. The judges were attacking the people themselves and they were feeding upon the lifeblood and sinews of the nation.

What is the judgment upon these individuals to be? Micah has a fine sense of poetic justice. He sees the irony in these things. So he says that the day is coming when these judges are going to cry out to the Lord for mercy. They are going to appeal to the Chief Justice of all the universe. But what is going to happen to them? God will not answer them. Instead, He is going to treat them the way they treated the innocent people of Jerusalem. He will hide His face from them. Judgment will come.

Micah 3:4 Then they will cry to the Lord, but He will not hear them; He will even hide His face from them at that time, because they have been evil in their deeds.

You do not have to turn there, but this brings to mind Isaiah 59:2, which says, "Your iniquities have separated you from your God." So they have a fierce list of iniquities and sins and they are totally separated from God at this point because God will not even answer them or hear them. He hides His face from them. The worst possible outcome for God's people to have to endure.

The second section or group that Micah talks about is prophets.

Micah 3:5 Thus says the Lord concerning the prophets who make My people stray; who chant "Peace" while they chew with their teeth, but who prepare war against him who puts nothing into their mouths . . .

We need to put this in the same kind of framework we used to talk about the corruption of the judges, dealing first with what Micah does not say. So let us turn to Amos 8. Now suppose the problem was merely that there was no word from God. Amos mentioned such an eventuality when he talks about God's coming judgment.

Amos 8:11-12 "Behold, the days are coming," says the Lord, "that I will send a famine on the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord. They shall wander from sea to sea, and from north to east; they shall run to and fro, seeking the word of the Lord, but shall not find it."

A situation like that is terrible. Not to hear God is to be cut off, but that is not the problem Micah faces. He is not complaining that the prophets are silent in Micah's day. The prophets *were* speaking. There were plenty of oracles

and much preaching at the time, but their words were all wrong. They were speaking, but everything they said led people astray. They prophesied peace when there was no peace, and prosperity when the city was about to fall.

Please turn over to Matthew 18. It is better to remain silent than to speak words that lead someone else astray, especially in spiritual matters. So Jesus talked about people who lead others astray.

Matthew 18:6-7 "Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea. Woe to the world because of offenses! For offenses must come, but woe to that man by whom the offense comes."

So in this matter, we are dealing with more than temporal justice. We are dealing with the eternal future of the lives of men and women. For a person to be led astray in this area, to be encouraged to perish without faith in Christ as God's way of salvation, is indefensible. Yet according to Micah, the prophets of Judah were guilty of this.

We can hardly imagine anything worse, yet Micah added two more charges. First, these prophets not only led others astray, they did it for money. It is terrible to make an error in the matter of salvation. It is more terrible to teach others your error. It is even worse to do it for personal gain. Sadly, it is happening today. Mainstream ministers and other religious leaders speak, write, and establish sects for money. They receive millions of dollars. What is God's judgment of such people to be? What will happen in the day when the Judge of all the earth brings forth justice?

The second charge is that these prophets knew better. They were not prophets of Baal. Micah considered them to be prophets of the living God who knew the truth and preferred to speak lies. He warned that their judgment would be appropriate. They have prophesied falsely, so when the city is destroyed and they cry out for a sure word from God for their people, they will have deserved it when He is silent.

Micah 3:6-8 "Therefore you shall have night without vision, and you should have darkness without divination; the sun shall go down

on the prophets and the day shall be dark for them. So the seers shall be ashamed, and the diviners abashed; indeed they shall all cover their lips; where there is no answer from God." But truly I am full of power by the Spirit of the Lord, and of justice and might, to declare to Jacob his transgression and to Israel his sin.

You do not have to turn there but Hebrews 10:31 reminds us that "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the Eternal."

The political leaders of Judah make up the third section or group. They are judged because they have distorted all that is right.

Micah 3:9-10 Now hear this, you heads of the house of Jacob and rulers of the house of Israel, who abhor justice and pervert all equity, who build up Zion with bloodshed and Jerusalem with iniquity.

So it is true that the judges distort justice and the prophets distorted the Word of God. But Micah speaks of distortion here particularly because these political leaders had a unique responsibility to order things correctly. They had a managerial role. Terms of God's directions for the proper functions of government. They were to see that justice was established through the courts and were to protect the nation against the encroachment of other nations. But Judah's leaders had failed to carry out their responsibilities.

Micah repeats in this section what he said earlier concerning the judges and prophets.

Micah 3:11 Her heads judge for a bribe, her priests teach for pay, and her prophets divine for money. Yet they lean on the Lord, and say, "Is not the Lord among us? No harm can come to upon us." [or something like, "We are God's people."]

Well, during World War II, probably every nation that had a Christian background was saying that God was with them as they attacked each other. So, here in Judah, Micah was saying similar things to that.

He repeats those charges here because the political leaders were responsible for overseeing the other branches and eliminating such practices. However, not only had they allowed it to happen, but they had also even encouraged it by creating a system in which everything was structured for their profit. Wow, does that sound like our government today! They use justice and religion to serve their own agenda, including religion today. And they grew richer at the expense of the poor. Look at the Catholic Church around the world and see how it has exploited the poor.

As America has become more wealthy and more secular, it has become less free. Individuals can differ as to whether these facts are correlated. But no honest person can deny that they are facts. The atheistic American medical profession as a whole and many individual doctors are responsible for the deaths of tens of thousands of Americans, very possibly more than that. Along with academia and the media Americans have been denied both lifesaving information and lifesaving remedies. Micah said that God was going to overthrow the leaders and the system they had created because they had not established or properly managed a just order.

In each case, the judgment is appropriate. The justices were going to cry for mercy and not get it. The prophets were going to call for a word from God and God was going to be silent. And the rulers were going to speak order but find chaos. It is their restlessness that causes chaos, in addition to their sin. But they sin because of their restlessness because they are not satisfied with what God has established as His law.

The end of this chapter is as dismal as possible. But the first five verses of chapter 4 really belong at the end of this section. The first two chapters of Micah form a long section in which the earlier part, that is, Micah 1:1 all the way through 2:11, has to do with justice. And at the very end, Micah 2:12-13, with hope. So apparently Micah did not want to end on a negative note. Justice must be done, judgment must come, but God is still the God of hope.

We have the same pattern here. Chapter 3 is about judgment. But then the first five verses of chapter 4 introduce hope. Another reason why Micah 4:1-5 belongs with chapter 3 is that there is a tie-in between them. Micah writes at the end of chapter 3 about the judgment to come upon the rulers.

Micah 3:12 Therefore because of you, Zion shall be plowed like a field, Jerusalem shall become heaps of ruins, and the mountain of the temple like the bare hills of the forest.

Then Micah moves into a two-chapter message of hope, which describes the reinstatement of the kingdom in chapter 4, verses 1-5, and the intervening captivity of the kingdom, chapter 4, verse 6 all the way to chapter 5, verse 1, and then concluding with the coming Ruler of the kingdom, chapter 5, verses 2-15. So the prophetic focus gradually narrows from the nations, to the remnant, to the king. Chapter 4 begins this way.

Micah 4:1 Now it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and peoples shall flow to it.

Notice the duality between the last part of chapter 3 and the beginning of chapter 4. In chapter 3, God prosecutes the leaders and people of Israel, and later Judah, and warns that His judgment of destruction for their sins is headed their way. God had Micah prophesy this about 2,700 years ago. Then at the beginning of chapter 4, God switches the timeframe from contemporary to a future end of the age statement: "it shall come to pass in the latter days." So this is not a millennial period. It is speaking of a pre-Kingdom time. God must establish His authority first, in the latter days.

But this does not necessarily mean that Micah's prophecy of judgment by complete destruction and captivity applies literally to the Israelitish people today. This presents us with the possibility but not the guarantee that this specific punishment will happen to the descendants of Israel and Judah today. Not exactly like this. It is just giving us an example of the harsh, let us say, judgment, but God is giving it so it is a fair judgment. So it is giving us an example of how severely God looks at sin and carries out judgment upon it.

God is warning of the seriousness of sin. It is against God and it is destructive to the sinner, his family, his community, and his nation, and the leaders who promote and inflict wickedness on others, especially the poor, will receive a much harsher judgment.

Micah is saying that by their mismanagement of sin, these corrupt rulers had made the mountain of God into a little mound, overgrown with thorns, but even so, Jerusalem was still to be God's mountain, the place of His justice where He demonstrates the righteousness of His name. So Micah says that God is going to raise it up to become a mountain again. In fact, it will be the mountain of mountains, the supreme mountain, and people will stream into it to worship the God who has done these things.

What happens then? Something really wonderful! Because as Micah begins to talk about it, he shows that under God's management, all that had been corrupted, Judah will be overcome and people will be set free to worship the Lord. Micah 4 mentions two freedoms: 1) freedom of want. Every man will sit under his own vine and under his own fig tree. 2) freedom from fear. No one will make them afraid, for the Lord God Almighty has spoken. These two freedoms must come first if the others are to be established.

Micah's list of freedoms begins with the freedom from ignorance. He does not mean mathematics, nor does he mean classical literature, he does not mean Greek or even Hebrew. He is talking about ignorance of the law of God. So, Micah is saying that in the day when God establishes His rule in Jerusalem, everyone we will learn the law of God and become teachers of it. A thought just crossed my mind considering each and every one of us, me included. Are we really working to be better teachers all the time? Are really putting forth the effort to be able to teach the law of God to others and to put it into terms that people who have just a very limited knowledge of God's Word can understand it?

The first freedom will be freedom from ignorance of God's law.

Micah 4:2 Many nations shall come and say, "Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths." For out

of Zion the law shall go forth, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.

Second, there will be freedom from war. That is found in verse 3. This verse is very familiar.

Micah 4:3 He shall judge between many peoples, and rebuke strong nations afar off; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore.

Isaiah 2:4 states the same positive results of God's judgment in the latter days and in the same wording as Micah.

Now it is significant that this freedom follows freedom from ignorance of God's law. That is, the freedom of law follows from freedom from ignorance of God's law. The basis for true peace is not a balance of weapons. The basis for true peace is knowledge of the law of God and obedience to that law and the gospel. When that takes place, people's hearts are changed. They desire peace and pursue it.

Third, it follows that there will then be freedom from want because the resources that go into war will be turned to other purposes, to good purposes.

Micah 4:4-5 But everyone shall sit under his vine and under his fig tree, and no one shall make them afraid; for the mouth of the Lord of hosts has spoken. For all people walk each in the name of his god, but we will walk in the name of the Lord our God forever and ever.

That is encouraging to every last Christian and every last believer that has ever lived. We are so thankful for those guarantees. During Solomon's reign it says in I Kings 4:25, "Judah and Israel dwelt safely, each man under his vine and his fig tree." So that was even possible during a human man's reign, Solomon's reign, that they could enjoy that for a while. Sadly, it was only under his reign. It was sporadically through other kings' reigns, but they were few and far between.

Finally, where there is freedom from want, in the end there will also be freedom from fear. And this is a glorious prophecy that he is giving here. It is a prophecy to people everywhere as to how the Golden Age, the age of God's full blessings in truth and righteousness will be found. Everyone will take care of his own responsibilities and not criticize others.

There is one more interesting thing in verse 2 that Micah writes. "Many nations will come and say, 'Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord,' and then toward the end of that same verse, he says, "For out of Zion, the law shall go forth." People will go up and the law will go out. Most of us are all for getting the law out. And the question is, have we first gone up to God to learn it from Him ourselves? We do not stand on any pinnacle of privilege as if we could speak from wisdom in and of ourselves. Rather, we must first go up to God seeking Him and seeking His instruction. You and I cannot remake this world. But we can be representatives of renewal, of justice, truth, and order if God first instructs us, transforms us, and empowers us. He is not going to do that if we do not make the effort to study His law, His Scriptures—the Word of God—to learn as much as we can from it, so that we can be just judges and true prophets and righteous leaders.

Now, the book of Micah is a little-known portion of the Word of God. But if there is any part of Micah likely to be known to the average Christian person, it is that which foretells the birth of Jesus Christ in Bethlehem.

Micah 5:2 "But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of you shall come forth to Me the One to be Ruler in Israel, whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting."

It was the part quoted by the chief priests and teachers of the law at the time of the birth of Christ as recorded in Matthew 2. Jesus had already been born in Bethlehem when the magi came to Jerusalem seeking Him. And Herod, who had not the slightest idea where Jesus might be, worried about any budding pretender to the throne.

Matthew 2:4-6 And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes [this is Herod] of the people together, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. So they said to him, "In

Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it is written by the prophet [think of Micah]: 'But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are not the least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you shall come a Ruler who will shepherd My people Israel.'"

So in the magi's response to Herod, the priests, and teachers combined Micah 5, verses 2 and 4, and predicted rightly that the coming divine King of Judah would be born in Bethlehem and shepherd God's people.

Now please turn back over to Micah 4, verse 6. This prophecy is the climax of the next section introduced by the phrase "in that day, says the Lord" all the way to Micah 5, verse 5, which completes the prophecy of the coming King of Judah. The section is tied together by strong imagery of sheep and their shepherds in Micah 4, verse 8, and Micah 5, verse 4, and of a woman in labor in Micah 4, verse 10. Also in Micah 5, verse 3 by increasingly hopeful predictions on current judgment joined to future blessing.

Micah 4:6-7 "In that day," says the Lord, "I will assemble the lame, I will gather the outcast and those whom I have afflicted; and I will make the lame a remnant and the outcast a strong nation. So the Lord will reign over them in Mount Zion from now on, even forever."

These two verses are probably best taken as a statement of a theme which the following three oracles developed. It is a hopeful theme in contrast to the dismay and grief expressed so far in the prophecy. These verses follow from what has gone before. Micah had been castigating the leaders of the people for their failure to do what they had been commissioned to do. Judges had failed to give justice, prophets had failed to speak the true word from God, and rulers had ceased to rule at all in many cases, or for their rule was so bad that it really was not true rule.

As a result, the kingdom was in chaos and even greater judgment was coming. But this was not the final word and the section ended with the prophecy of a Golden Age to be marked by four freedoms. As I mentioned, freedom from ignorance of God's law, freedom from war, freedom from want, and freedom from fear. In this section, Micah continues the thought to say that the Golden Age will also be a time of regathering. It is true that

judgment will come, Jerusalem will fall, and the people will be scattered. But God is going to regather the people and rule over them again from Mount Zion.

Micah introduces a comforting image at this point saying that the Lord will rule over His people as a shepherd watches over his sheep. I will just quote it because you are so familiar with it.

Psalm 23:1-4 The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters. He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.

The "Lord is my shepherd" is how that begins. So even though the fall of Jerusalem and the ensuing captivity would be a valley of the shadow of death for the people, God would nevertheless be with them and eventually restore them to their land. Later in the Psalms, we find the same image.

Psalm 100:3 Know that the Lord, He is God; it is He who has made us, and not we ourselves; we are His people and the sheep of His pasture.

And the prophet Isaiah wrote,

Isaiah 40:10-11 Behold, the Lord God shall come with a strong hand, and His arm shall rule for Him; behold, His reward is with Him, and His work before Him. He will feed His flock like a shepherd; He will gather the lambs with His arm, and carry them in His bosom, and gently lead those who are with young.

So, back to Micah. Micah is saying that this is what God will do with the captives of Judah. He will gather them as a shepherd gathers limping sheep, assemble them into a flock, and eventually return them to their capital city. What a difference such a shepherd makes.

Most of you are familiar with the name Philip Keller who wrote a book on the 23rd Psalm and he says, "A lot in life of any particular sheep is dependent on the type of man who owned it. Some men are gentle, kind, intelligent, brave, and selfless in their devotion to their stock. Under one man, sheep would struggle, starve, and suffer endless hardship. In another's care they would flourish and thrive contentedly."

So Micah is telling us that even in times of judgment it is good to be in the gentle care of Israel's Good Shepherd.

Now, the first of the three oracles found in Micah 4:8 through Micah 5:5 is the least hopeful, but it starts the transition from judgment to restoration. Micah writes with scorn, looking ahead to the time of captivity.

Micah 4:8-10 "And you, O tower of the flock, the stronghold of the daughter of Zion, to you shall it come, even the former dominion shall come, the kingdom of the daughter of Jerusalem." Now why do you cry aloud? Is there no king in your midst? Has your counselor perished? For pangs have seized you like a woman in labor. Be in pain, and labor to bring forth, O daughter of Zion, like a woman in birth pangs. For now you shall go forth from the city, you shall dwell on the field, and to Babylon you should go. There you shall be delivered; there the Lord will redeem you from the hand of your enemies.

Such language may seem cruel to us. It may be difficult to see any good motive in it, or imagine any good coming from it. But of course, Micah's motive is good and good will come, and his concern is to awaken people to the true gravity of their situation and lead them to repentance. And as we learned earlier, he was successful. Micah employs shock tactics. He mocks the people for their unbelief, but not out of cruelty. He speaks in love. Furthermore, even as he foretells Jerusalem's fall and ensuing captivity, he cannot help but speak of the nation's deliverance. You will go to Babylon, he says, but there you will be rescued; there the Lord will redeem you out of the hand of your enemies.

In the first of the three oracles appearing in this section, there are three times more phrases of judgment than of hope. In the second oracle the proportion

shifts in the direction of hope. There are two and one-half times more phrases of hope than of judgment.

Micah 4:11-13 Now also many nations have gathered against you, who say, "Let her be defiled, and let our eye look upon Zion." But they do not know the thoughts of the Lord, nor do they understand His counsel; for He will gather them like sheaves to the threshing floor. "Arise and thresh, O daughter of Zion; for I will make your horn iron, and I will make your hooves bronze; you shall beat in pieces many peoples; I will consecrate their gain to the Lord, and their substance to the Lord of the whole earth."

In these verses, Micah begins with the situation that confronted the nation as he spoke. "But now many nations are gathered against you," they say, "let her be defiled, let our eyes gloat over Zion." But he immediately passes on to say that these nations do not know the Lord's plan and that God will yet give Judah horns of iron to drive them out and break their armies into pieces. So verse 12 takes us back to Micah 2:1-3 where Micah first contrasted those who plotted iniquity and God who plans judgment. In the earlier passage, he was referring to the corrupt rulers of Judah. Here, he refers to the pagan nations who are planning to overthrow Jerusalem.

There is a problem here that is evident to anyone who reads the chapter carefully. Micah has been telling of the fall of Jerusalem throughout his prophecy and has apparently been thinking along these lines even as late as verse 11. But in verse 12, he writes of deliverance from the very enemies who were then gathering against the city. This seems contradictory and may well have been puzzling to Micah's hearers. How can the nation fall to the Babylonians and be delivered at the same time? How can Jerusalem win and yet lose? At the time he said these words, it was probable that no one, maybe not even Micah, had answers to those questions. But in view of the history of the nation, we can see what was involved.

When Micah wrote, the city was threatened by the armies of Sennacherib. This threat, plus the prophecies of Micah and Isaiah drove King Hezekiah and the other leaders of Jerusalem to their knees. A revival followed and God delivered Jerusalem. God's angel killed 185,000 Assyrian soldiers. When Sennacherib saw the carnage, he was appalled and withdrew. This is

probably what Micah is referring to as a prophecy directly for Judah at that time. As a result of his preaching, there was a true but temporary deliverance. People did repent, but soon after they returned to their sin and the judgment pictured in the bulk of the prophecy came upon them.

(This brings to mind this nation's experience with 9/11 and how people turned to God in their own way, not the right way necessarily. Some did. They went back to church and prayed and they were afraid and they were on their knees, But as time went on, just a mere weeks or months (not years), they began to go back to their old ways. And so in a sense, God, was shooting across the bow of a ship to warn us that this nation, if it does not straighten itself out, it is susceptible to the powers of other nations and He may use it to punish this nation. But this nation did not do very much at all about that shot across the bow.)

Now it appears that the oracle of Micah 4:11-13 refers to Sennacherib's invasion. It is also in view at the start of the well known verses that predict the birth of Christ.

Micah 5:1 Now gather yourself in troops, O daughter of troops; he has laid siege against us; they will strike the judge of Israel with a rod on the cheek.

The expression daughter of troops is a Hebrew expression that forms a Hebrew grammatical function signifying character and depicts Jerusalem as a warlike city. This may be a reference to the social crimes that Micah describes in warlike terminology elsewhere in the book of Micah. For example, one we read not too long ago in,

Micah 3:2-3 You who hate good and love evil; who strip the skin from My people, and the flesh from their bones; who also eat the flesh of My people, flay their skin from them, break their bones, and chop them in pieces.

That is war. Now that is mental war in some cases and I am sure that is part of the way that this was meant. But it also refers to what nations do when they attack another nation, especially the Gentile nations. The implication of this expression would then be that Jerusalem, so renowned for its hostility

toward the less privileged, is to suffer the debilitating slowness of siege because of its long-term abuse of the weak and poor. Micah speaks of a siege in which the invading forces symbolically strike Israel's ruler on the cheek with a rod. It suggests public humiliation, which the invasion of Sennacherib certainly was. Micah replies that this will not be the unending case for Judah or for Jerusalem because there will be a time of permanent triumph and greatness when the divine ruler prophesied for Israel comes.

Micah 5:2 is one of the clearest and most important of all the Old Testament prophecies and Micah has two points to emphasize. First, he stresses that the One to be born in Bethlehem will be Ruler over Israel. This prophecy about the birthplace and eternity of the Messiah was made 700 years before His birth.

Micah 5:2 "But you Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of you shall come forth to Me the One to be Ruler in Israel, whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting."

This is not a theme unique to Micah of course. In II Samuel 7:16 God promised King David, "Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before Me. Your throne will be established forever." So in his response, David recognized that an eternal kingdom is not the destiny of mere men. A prophecy like this requires a divine king for its fulfillment. Isaiah intensified the promises in Isaiah 9.

Isaiah 9:6-7 For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder, and His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, to order it and establish it with judgment and justice from that time forward, and forever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this.

This is not the way with human kings and kingdoms. On the contrary, history shows the kingdoms of this world rising and falling across the centuries. Historians, like Arnold Toynbee tell us that the world has known 21 great

civilizations, but all of them have endured only for a time and then have passed away. Babylon was mighty; today it is gone. Greece and Rome have fallen and now not even the United States, China, and Russia, will be able to escape that inexorable law of God for history. Proverbs 14:34 says, "Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people." Isaiah 60:12 says, "For the nation and kingdom which will not serve [God] shall perish, and those nations shall be utterly ruined."

Now, the normal course of the kingdoms of this world is described in an effective way and Daniel reveals a pattern. You are very familiar with this, but it is interesting to see the pattern.

Daniel 5:24-28 Then the fingers of the hand were sent from Him [that is, God], and this writing was written. "And this is the inscription that was written: MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN. This is the interpretation of each word. *MENE*: God has numbered your kingdom, and finished it; *TEKEL*: You have been weighed in the balances, and found wanting; *PERES*: Your kingdom has been divided, given to the Medes and Persians."

The key words there are numbered, wanting, finished, and divided. So there is a pattern there of what happens to human governments throughout human history.

Daniel 5:18-22 "O king, the Most High God gave Nebuchadnezzar your father a kingdom and majesty and glory and honor. [speaking to Belshazzar] And because of the majesty that He gave him, all peoples, nations, and languages trembled and feared before him. Whomever he wished, he executed; whomever he wished, he kept alive; whomever he wished, he set up; and whomever he wished, he put down. But when his heart was lifted up, and his spirit was hardened in pride, he was deposed from his kingly throne, and they took his glory from him. Then he was driven from the sons of men, and his heart was made like the beasts, and his dwelling was with the wild donkeys. They fed him with grass like oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven, till he knew that the Most High

God rules in the kingdom of men, and appoints over it whomever He chooses. But you his son, Belshazzar, have not humbled your heart, although you knew all this."

So, all human kings and kingdoms follow this course. God lets a man rise above his associates in power, he is overcome with pride, and eventually God brings him down. It is not this way with Jesus Christ. His Kingdom is forever. We can imagine a king who would rule like this and yet be undesirable because he was a tyrant. But this is not the way it will be according to Micah. The One to come will be a ruler in Israel who will stand and shepherd His flock.

Micah 5:3 Therefore He shall give them up, until the time that she who is in labor has given birth; and then the remnant of His brethren shall return to the children of Israel.

Israel will enter a period of absolute abandonment by God because of her sin. Her sin separates her from God and Hosea also spoke of a time when Israel would not be God's people.

Micah 5:4-5 And He shall stand and feed His flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord His God; and they shall abide, for now He shall be great to the ends of the earth; and this One shall be peace.

In using this image, Micah stresses the compassion and gentle care of the divine King. The deliverer is to be in the embodiment of the strength and might of God, communicating that attribute to the people under His authority and thereby establishing their security. The gracious benefits of His reign are to extend beyond national limitations because the authority of the King is to be universal in scope because His greatness is to extend to the ends of the earth.

The description of His power goes perfectly with the description of universal peace and complements it by affirming that the peace described there will be affected by the ruler born in the insignificant town of Bethlehem. And it is

impossible for one who lives on our side of the birth, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ to read this and not think of Jesus' claim to be the good shepherd in John 10.

John 10:11 "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep."

Now there have been other shepherds, of course. In ancient times, most kings were considered shepherds to some degree. But Jesus is not like those other shepherd-kings. Which of them could possibly be called a good shepherd, much less *the* good shepherd? Yet Jesus is both the unique and good shepherd of all who are His people. In John 10 where Jesus calls himself the good shepherd there are two explanations of why He is designated in this way.

First, Jesus is the good shepherd because He laid down His life for the sheep. "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep." Christ's death was voluntary. In Acts 2:23, Peter spoke of Christ saying, "This Man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge." In Matthew 1:21, the angel told Joseph Jesus was born for this, and you [Joseph] are to give Him the name Jesus, because "He will save His people from their sins."

Jesus died, not for His own sin—He had none—but for our sins, and in our place. Remember what He said. "The good shepherd gives his life for [His] sheep." He willingly gave His life for our salvation. We are justified by faith, having an unshakable hope, knowing we will be saved by virtue of Christ's substitutionary death on our behalf. Paul says,

Romans 5:6-8 For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

It is not just Christ's love that was shown in His death, but also God the Father's love. While God's righteousness and justice led to His plan of salvation through the death of Jesus Christ, it was His love that motivated this plan.

The second explanation of why Jesus is the good shepherd is that He knows His sheep and is known by them.

John 10:14-15 "I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own. As the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep."

Friends know one another, parents know their children, a husband and wife know each other in a special and beautiful way. In spite of these things there is in each of us a deep inner hunger to be known better, to be known for what we really are, and to share our corresponding and similar knowledge of each other. This exists on a spiritual level because though we are sinners and have been in rebellion against God, there is nevertheless a certain hunger to know God and to be known by Him. There is a certain restlessness. A person's heart is restless until he finds his rest in Christ.

Matthew 11:28-30 "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light."

Jesus is the good shepherd because He satisfies that deep longing of the human heart and mind. He knows us as His sheep and to be known by Him is to be a member of His flock and therefore to be one for whom He died. And we will never be snatched from His hand. So we want to make sure that we do our best to know Him through His Word.