

Biblical Optimism, With a Dash of Reality

Micah 4:9-13

Introduction – What have we been promised in this chapter? Zion will be exalted above all other mountains (v1), drawing all nations to herself and bringing peace on earth (vv 2-5). Those who have been afflicted, the meek, will personally be assembled in victory (v6), to inherit the earth (vv7-8). It's enough to make one giddy with a simplistic optimism. But as we have seen, the triumph comes as a result of the purification. And purification comes from the fire of trials.

Micah guards against the abuse which might be made of this optimistic hope. He gives a clear exhortation to those who might carelessly fancy that the threat of punishment was not meant so seriously after all. But that is balanced with a rebuke to the very nations He will use to chastise His children.

The Text – *“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 in the field, and to Babylon you shall go. There you shall be delivered; there the LORD will redeem you from the hand of your enemies. 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.”*

God's Strategy With Israel (vv9-10) – With prophetic language, Micah anticipates what Israel will say during its exile. But this paradigm exists for every believer who experiences a time of trial and suffering. Just as Micah gave this message to Israel before the actual trial, so it is good for all believers to consider how they will walk through future sufferings.

King and Counselor – The glories have been promised, but “now” there are severe trials to go through. These rhetorical questions betray the faltering faith of Israel when she goes through these trials.

Be In Pain – Labor coaches in delivery rooms speak like this – ‘go with the pain’. This vivid illustration of the labor and birth is very appropriate. There are sharp pains, but they lead to life. This is not a ‘health and wealth’ gospel, for God has not ever promised that there will not be any suffering here. Quite the opposite *“all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution”* (2 Tim 3:12).

Prophetic Details – Micah takes the time to describe the exile. First, you will be driven from the city. Then you will live in the open fields, and finally you will be brought to Babylon. Isaiah will later make a prophecy about Babylon as well (2 Kings 20:12-19). Even while Assyria is God's appointed tool, He knows His plans to use nations in the future.

God's Strategy With The Other Nations (vv11-13) – God entices the other nations, making it look as though Israel is easy to overthrow. He uses these nations to perfect Israel through discipline, but He never leaves the remnant. For God has His plans, and they are never thwarted, even in the midst of the plans for evil being devised by the wicked nations. This is sovereignty in all its glory.

The Use of Many Nations – In its near fulfillment, all the enemies of Israel came together, hoping to destroy her. They saw that God had left her for a while in their hands, so they maliciously sought her destruction. But there is another “Israel” whom many nations gathered against, and in this One we see the complete fulfillment (Acts 4:27-28). In both situations, these enemies of God “... do not know the thoughts of the Lord, nor do they understand His counsel”. They look like they are in charge, but they don't have a clue.

Arise and Thresh – There is a great contrast here to the command in verse 9 to ‘be in pain’. There comes a time when the trial is over, God reveals His hand, and the battle turns. Is this fulfilled at Sennacherib's defeat (2 Kings 18:13 – 19:37)? There is so much more promised in the context of Chapters 4-5, we should see that defeat again as a type of what Christ and His church will do. *“And whoever falls on this stone will be broken; but on whomever it falls, it will grind him to powder”* (Matt 21:44).

The Consecration of the Whole Earth – This threshing is going to accomplish something. All the gain will be the Lord's, and it will be granted to Him as “Lord of the whole earth” (see also Haggai 2:6-9). This kingdom is not simply manifest in heaven, but upon the earth as well. This is why we pray, *“Thy kingdom come, they will be done on earth as it is in heaven”*. This is why Jesus said *“All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth ...”*

Conclusion – We certainly are not being persecuted today with the viciousness that many have experienced. Nor do we face some of the terrible trials the church has been through. But we may.

Pathetic Gospel – When all we preach is that Jesus would like to be your friend if you would like to come to Him, there is no threat. If Jesus is simply waiting for us, hoping we will decide for Him, the gospel will never be a force, so no one will attack it.

Gospel Threshing - But we are told to 'disciple the nations', and we are promised that they will. And when reformation takes hold of the church, there will be opposition.

Personal Trials - Having an optimistic view of the future does not promise a health-and-wealth gospel for today. It pleases God to take us through many trials. Tribulation produces perseverance, character, and hope (Rom 5:1-5).

And so, there are times to 'be in pain' and there are times to 'arise and thresh'.

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