

THE MOUNTAIN OF THE LORD

MICAH 4

The opening verse of Micah tells us where and when and for whom it was written. It does this by telling us which kings of Judah were reigning at the time of his prophetic ministry.

The word of the LORD which came to Micah of Moresheth in the days of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, which he saw concerning Samaria and Jerusalem. (Micah 1:1).

These were some troubled times for the kingdom of Judah. It was a time that saw the threat of a terrible invader from the north. The Assyrian Empire (modern day Iraq) was preparing to come down upon the nation of Israel. The northern kingdom of Israel would shortly be taken into a captivity from which she would never return.

The southern kingdom of Judah would also be surrounded and threatened. A great many of her cities would be carried off until only a small remnant remained.

Micah's prophecy not only foretells these events; his prophecy also tells us WHY these events were to take place. They were a judgment against the sins of Samaria and Judah.

5 *All this is for the rebellion of Jacob
And for the sins of the house of Israel.
What is the rebellion of Jacob? Is it not Samaria?
What is the high place of Judah? Is it not Jerusalem?*
6 *For I will make Samaria a heap of ruins in the open country,
Planting places for a vineyard.
I will pour her stones down into the valley,
And will lay bare her foundations. (Micah 1:5-6).*

Both Israel and Judah come under condemnation. He begins with the northern kingdom of Israel and its capital city of Samaria. You can go to Jerusalem today and you will find a thriving, bustling city. But if you go to Samaria, you will only find a ruined heap of scattered stones as a mute testimony to the judgment of God.

And yet, as we come to the fourth chapter of Micah, we have a wonderful promise.

- 1 *And it will come about in the last days
That the mountain of the house of the LORD
Will be established as the chief of the mountains.
It will be raised above the hills,
And the peoples will stream to it.*
- 2 *And many nations will come and say,
“Come and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD
And to the house of the God of Jacob,
That He may teach us about His ways
And that we may walk in His paths.”
For from Zion will go forth the law,
Even the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.*
- 3 *And He will judge between many peoples
And render decisions for mighty, distant nations.
Then they will hammer their swords into plowshares
And their spears into pruning hooks;
Nation will not lift up sword against nation,
And never again will they train for war.(Micah 4:1-3).*

This passage is repeated nearly word for word in Isaiah 2:2-4. Did Micah quote from Isaiah or was it the other way around? We do not know and it is not really important.

Micah’s prophecy starts with a small and often overlooked word. It is the word “and.” I checked the Hebrew text and, sure enough, it was also there. I imagine it was there for a reason. When you say the word, “and,” you are joining two thoughts together. This prophecy is being joined and contrasted to the description of judgment that takes place in the previous chapters.

Micah has just said at the end of the previous chapter that *the mountain of the temple will become high places of a forest* (3:12). You might hear the word “forest” and think that is a good thing, but it carries the idea that the temple mount will become a desolate wilderness. This refers to the fact that the temple in Jerusalem would be destroyed. This was a prophecy that was fulfilled at the hands of Nebuchadnezzar and his Babylonians who captured Jerusalem and burned the temple in 586 B.C.

We who live in the 21st century would be hard pressed to imagine what this meant to the people of the old covenant. The temple represented their connection to God. It was here that the sacrifices were made; it was here that the covenant rituals were performed; it was here that sin was forgiven.

- No more temple meant no more relationship with God.
- No more temple meant your prayers would go no further than the ceiling.

- No more temple meant no more sacrifice for sin and no more salvation.

Years later, the Psalmist would lament, “How can we sing the Lord’s songs in a foreign land?” No more temple meant the mountain of God would become the mountain of a wilderness of trees and of wild animals.

The promise that is given here has to be seen against the backdrop of the darkness of the judgments of the previous chapters. Seeing them in such a light is like seeing a diamond against the backdrop of black velvet.

The previous chapters warned of a coming judgment in which the people would be scattered and the temple destroyed. First the temple would be destroyed and become a place of barrenness, but in the last days the temple would be restored as a place of blessing.

There is coming a day when, not only the children of Israel, but many nations will come to the mountain of the house of the Lord.

THE IDENTITY OF THE MOUNTAIN

The Scriptures speak often about the Mountain of the house of the Lord. We hear those words and we naturally think of the temple in Jerusalem. That is where the house of the Lord was located. Yet the idea of the Mountain of the Lord was present long before the building of Solomon’s temple.

- The mountain on which God appeared to Moses in the burning bush was described as both “the mountain of God” (Exodus 3:1) and “the mount of the Lord” (Numbers 10:33).
- The song of Moses gives a promise of how the Lord would plant His people upon the mountain of His inheritance.

*Thou wilt bring them and plant them in the mountain of Thine inheritance,
The place, O LORD, which Thou hast made for Thy dwelling,
The sanctuary, O Lord, which Thy hands have established. (Exodus 15:17).*

- The mountain of God is the place from which the covering cherub was cast down.

Ezekiel 28:12-16 give a lamentation over one who is called “the king of Tyre,” yet as

we read this lamentation, we are brought into the presence of one who is more than a mere secular king of a seaside kingdom.

- This person was *in Eden, the garden of God (28:13)*.
- He is described in Ezekiel 28:14 as *the anointed cherub who covers*.
- There was a time when this person was *on the holy mountain of God* and he was cast down from the mountain of God.

Who was this anointed cherub that was cast out of Eden and from the Mountain of God? It sounds very much like Satan, the angel who fell from the presence of God.

Just as Eden was the place of the presence of God on the original earth, so the mountain of God is descriptive of the idea where God's presence comes to meet mankind. In the Old Testament, this was most often the Temple, and so it is natural for us to hear this term and picture the Temple.

The city of Jerusalem is surrounded upon all sides by mountains. Although it is itself upon a mountain ridge, it is not the highest. There are several surrounding mountains which are higher. But the picture here is of the mountain of the house of the Lord - the Temple Mount - being raised up above the surrounding mountains.

MEANING OF THE PROPHECY

What does it all mean? How are we to understand this prophecy? There are some who would predict future geological changes to take place in the land of Palestine. But this is not geological language. It is figurative language.

When did the nations begin to come to the Temple? It was seen at the Pentecost incident when we are given in the Scriptures a listing of all of the nations that were gathered. Acts 2 tells us how, after Jesus had been crucified and buried and after He had risen from the dead and had been seen by His disciples and by others and after He had ascended into heaven, the small band of believers were gathered in Jerusalem, wondering what God was going to do next.

Suddenly, there came a sound like a mighty rushing wind and the wind of God -- the Spirit of God -- came rushing upon them and was manifested in tongues of fire that stood over them and in a verbal gift of tongues that allowed them to communicate to the culturally diverse crowd in all of the various languages that were represented on that day.

It was the birth of the church and it began with the message of the gospel being preached to

the nations in the languages of those nations. This was something that we take for granted today but it was something that had never before taken place in history.

The nations gathered to Jerusalem and, even today, the nations of the world look to Jerusalem as the center of most of the major religions. It was in Jerusalem that...

- The church was born.
- The Christ was crucified and buried and rose again.
- The Spirit was given.

It can be said today that, spiritually speaking, the nations continue to stream to Jerusalem, not to a temple made with hands, but to the spiritual temple that was made by God and not by men.

You see, the real temple is not the one that stood on a piece of real estate in the Middle East. That was only a shadow of the real temple.

If you don't hear anything else, then make sure you do not miss this point. The real temple is Jesus. He is the House of God. He is the Temple which was destroyed and which was raised up again in three days. He is the One who said, "If I be lifted up from the earth, I will draw all men to Myself" (John 12:32).

You might be asking, "How can Jesus be a temple?" All you have to do is to ask yourself, "What is a temple?"

- A temple is a place where God comes to meet His people.
- It is a place where sacrifices are made.
- It is a place of worship and of prayer.
- It is a place to which you go to meet God.

That describes Jesus.

- He is the place where God has come to meet His people. When one of His disciples asked what they could do to meet God, Jesus answered, *"Have I been so long with you, and yet you have not come to know Me? He who has seen Me has seen the Father"* (John 14:8).
- He is the place where the true and ultimate sacrifice was made.

Hebrews 9:24-26. *For Christ did not enter a holy place made with hands, a mere copy of the true one, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us; 25 nor was it that He should offer Himself often, as the high priest enters the holy*

place year by year with blood not his own. ²⁶ Otherwise, He would have needed to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now once at the consummation of the ages He has been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.

- He is the place of worship and of prayer. He said, *I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me* (John 14:6).
- He is the place where you go to meet God: *No man has seen God at any time; the only begotten God, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him.* (John 1:18).

When people come to Jesus, they are coming to the true temple that God has established. This passage in Micah 4 tells us that this temple would be lifted up and that people would stream to it. They have, you know. People have been coming to Christ for the past 2000 years. They are still coming today. We are sitting here on a Sunday morning, half a world away from where the good news first went out. We are here because we have come to Christ. We are here because we have come to the One who is the House of God and have believed in Him and have been identified with Him.

Because of that, WE ARE ALSO CALLED THE HOUSE OF GOD. What is the house of God today? It is the CHURCH. Paul says in 1 Timothy 3:15, *I write so that you may know how one ought to conduct himself in **the household** of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth.*

What is the house of God today? It is the church. This means that the exhortations and the promises that are given to believers in the Old Testament will also apply to the church today.

Let's look first at the PROMISE

*And each of them will sit under his vine
And under his fig tree,
With no one to make them afraid,
For the mouth of the LORD of hosts has spoken. (Micah 4:4).*

The reference to sitting under one's own vine and under one's own fig tree is a picture of peace and prosperity. It pictures a return to the golden age under Solomon.

So Judah and Israel lived in safety, every man under his vine and his fig tree, from Dan even to Beersheba, all the days of Solomon. (1 Kings 4:25).

This becomes a catch phrase to describe the blessings of God upon His people. The future blessings of God would continue to be described as a time when every man would be "under

his vine and his fig tree” (Zechariah 3:10).

We are promised a blessing from God. It is pictured in the Old Testament as having your own vine and your own fig tree, but there is more here than a botanical green thumb. This describes the blessing of God.

This brings us to the million dollar question. How do I enter into this blessing? The answer is that, if you are a Christian, then you have already been blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus. It is not a matter of getting blessed; it is a matter of coming to understand and to appreciate the blessings that you have.

Living the Christian life without an understanding of the blessings of the Christian life is like being a multimillionaire without an understanding of how to draw any funds from your bank account. You might be rich, but you are not enjoying those riches.

You need to understand and believe that God is your Heavenly Father. How would you act if your father was Bill Gates? You would go to him with your needs and your wants and your requests. You are called in the Bible to do the same thing.

You do not have because you do not ask. 3 You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures. (James 4:2-3).

Your Heavenly Father has more than Bill Gates can possibly imagine. He is ready and willing to bless you, but you must ask. Notice that you also must ask for the right thing and you must ask with the right motives. God’s blessing is not merely to give you a temporary thrill. God’s blessings are richer than that. They are heavenly blessings. They are eternal blessings.

His blessings involve bringing you to your full potential. They involve bringing you to the place where you accomplish that for which you were made.

There is a wonderful fulfillment in such an objective. There is no greater fulfillment in life than to do that for which you were made. It involves both a sense of security and belonging as well as a sense of significance.

Security asks, “Do I belong?”
Significance asks, “Do I matter?”

These are the two great yearning in the human soul and they are both found in the One who gave of Himself to prepare a place for you and who designed you as His own workmanship to do a special work.

This brings us to the EXHORTATION of this passage. The promises of the Bible always have a “so what?” They are not given so that you will have a blueprint of the future or so that you can write a fictional book about being left behind that will make a lot of money. They are not written so that you can be smug in your view of future prophecy. They are written so that you will believe and that, having believed, you will live differently today.

All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; 17 that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work. (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

That is true of all of the Bible and it is also true about those portions of the Bible that we consider to be prophecy. Prophecy is meant to point us to Jesus and then it is meant to lead us in living.

This chapter does that. It speaks of how the mountain of the house of the Lord and how it will be established and how the nations will come streaming and how the blessing will be abundant and, just in case you didn't see Jesus in the promise, you need only look a few verses later where the prophet says...

*But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah,
Too little to be among the clans of Judah,
From you One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel.
His goings forth are from long ago,
From the days of eternity. (Micah 5:2).*

The reason the mountain of the temple of the Lord can be lifted up is because the One whose goings forth from the days of eternity entered time and space to be born in Bethlehem so that He might be lifted up on a cross and pay for your sins and for mine.

A QUESTION OF APPLICATION

If this prophecy points to Jesus and He is the One who has been lifted up, then what does that mean for me today and what does it mean to me as I live my life, as I love my wife, as I work at my job and as I do all the daily things of life?

1. If Jesus is your Mountain, you can trust Him with all your fears.

A mountain was used in the ancient world as a place of safety. Paula and I traveled through Greece and Turkey last year and one of the things that impressed us was that each ancient city we visited would have a high place that served as a place of refuge

from danger. It was a place to which you would run if there was an enemy or a flood or wild animals.

What are you facing that scares you to death? It might be any number of things. It might be the prospect of death itself. There is good news here. You can go to the One who has been tempted in every area of life and who has suffered death itself and has then come back to tell you that you can trust in Him.

If you are trusting in Jesus, then He is your rock and your fortress and your secure place. You say, "Wait a minute John, I know that Jesus is a rock and a fortress and a secure place and a mountain, but there are times when I feel like Christianity is a mountain from which I am in danger of falling."

I can identify with that. I had opportunity to do some rock climbing while Paula and I were in Alaska. There is something exhilarating and electrifying and even a little scary about hanging onto a rock face with your toes and fingernails. I was about sixty feet up on the face of the rock when I felt my handhold slip and my balance shift and I would have fallen and died save for one thing. I was tied in. I had a rope secured to an anchor that was secure to the rock and it was not going anywhere.

Hebrews 6:19 says that we have an anchor of the soul. It is not based upon how good a hold I have on Christ; it is based upon His hold on me and that brings with it a real sense of security.

If Jesus is your mountain, then you can rest secure in Him. Are you worried about...

- Your job?
- Your health?
- Your children or grandchildren?

You can take those worries to the One who is your rock and your fortress and know that He is your place of safety and that nothing can come your way that did not come first through a nail-scarred hand.

2. If Jesus is your mountain, then you can get a larger perspective on life.

Being on a mountain gives you a sense of perspective that you don't get when you are down in a valley. When we come to the Lord and look into His word, we get a sense of perspective in life that we will miss amidst the daily humdrum of living.

What do I see when I look at my life from God's perspective?

- I see one who has been declared righteous and holy in the sight of God. He

says to me, “I am declaring you to be righteous; now you go and live righteously/

- I see one whose life was planned and designed by a God who loves me and who works for good all things that come into my life.
- I see the detours of my life as the Lord’s divine appointments in which He is taking me and shaping me into the person He wants me to be.
- I see the people in my life as being there because He has brought them to me, either to seek or to save or to otherwise influence for His kingdom.
- I see the daily struggles and the not-so-daily struggles as skirmishes in a much larger conflict. I am a part of a cosmic conflict, the whole of which I will not understand on this side of eternity. I can read of Job and the things he went through and how he was not aware of the heavenly interactions that affected life on earth and I can know that the things I go through here on earth echo and resound from heaven’s throne.

This brings me to a third result of seeing Jesus as my mountain.

3. If Jesus is your Mountain, you can be lifted up.

You aren’t low when you are on a mountain. It is an exhilarating experience. The Lord gives us His precious promises to lift us up and to encourage us and to raise our spirits and our hope.

I mentioned a few minutes ago that we all hunger for significance and for security.

Security asks, “Do I belong?”

Significance asks, “Do I matter?”

If Jesus is your mountain, then He also answers your need for significance because when you come to a mountain, you come to something that is very big and very significant and Jesus calls you to come and to be a part of THAT.

This is a call to live significantly.

- Husbands, it is a call to love your wives and to put such love into action as Christ also put His love into action. Maybe that means washing a few dishes or helping around the house or rubbing her tired feet and recognizing that such actions have eternal echos.

- Wives, it is a call to submission and support and encouragement for your husbands because you have the ability to set the mood for your marriage and such a mood will leave a legacy for future generations.
- Kids, it is a call to live an obedient and godly lifestyle today because tomorrow you will be the person you are becoming today and you have a lot of tomorrows ahead of you.
- It is a call for all of you to live purposefully and significantly, knowing that you are a part of something bigger than you. Hebrews 12:22-24 says that *you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels, ²³ to the general assembly and church of the first-born who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, ²⁴ and to Jesus.*

This is a call to recognize the One to whom you have come and then to go out and live in accordance with such a call.