

The Encouragements of Micah

David H. Linden, University Presbyterian Church, Las Cruces, New Mexico, April, 2017

The particular encouragements in this article are those of God's future agenda being fulfilled with finality. This is eschatology. The deliverance Jerusalem enjoyed in the days of the Old Testament prophets is real encouragement, but not the subject I am writing about now. Further, the words of sober judgment are also good news, because any god who cares little about his own holiness or authority is not the living and true God, worthy of worship. The God of Israel brings sinners to account and shows His grace by bringing salvation to the earth. *"For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD as the waters cover the sea"* (Habakkuk 2:14). That is a day Micah spoke of that can be seen only by the eyes of faith.

4:1-5 It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the LORD shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and it shall be lifted up above the hills; and peoples shall flow to it, 2 and many nations shall come, and say: "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths." For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. 3 He shall judge between many peoples, and shall decide for strong nations far away; and 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; 4 but they shall sit every man 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. 5 For all the peoples walk each in the name of its god, but we will walk in the name of the LORD our God forever and ever.

Instead of nations coming to invade the land God gave to His people, as happened in horrendous fulfillment of the prophets' warnings, God intended the salvation of those nations. The ironic twist is evident, Israel might worship the gods of the nations, but God would bring the nations to know Himself as the God of all the earth. Their worship would be transforming of their lives. Unlike typical Israel the Gentiles would be eager to obey. Their old policy of murdering their neighbors would cease. Lives of fruitful labor would bring them prosperity, and God would give them security. Then they, of all people, would say what the covenant people should have, *"... all the peoples walk each in the name of its god, but we will walk in the name of the LORD our God forever and ever."* (4:5) The Holy Spirit Who moved Micah to include such words on Gentile lips, has them calling the LORD their God as true entrants into the covenant. God's word to Abraham will come to pass, *"... in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed"* (Genesis 12:3).

This important prediction also appears in Isaiah 2:1-4. Isaiah then appeals, *"O house of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the LORD"* v.5. The idea is that the heathen Gentiles will walk in the light of our God, should not we the covenant people do the same?

4:6,7 In that day, declares the LORD, I will assemble the lame and gather those who have been driven away and those whom I have afflicted; 7 and the lame I will make the remnant, and those who were cast off, a strong nation; and the LORD will reign over them in Mount Zion from this time forth and forevermore.

Here the words *in that day* show that Micah speaks of the same time as the coming of the nations to the LORD. I think the ones who have been afflicted are those chastened for straying from the Lord, thus I interpret 4:6,7 as a word to Israel. He will reverse the suffering of those who repent, making them the holy remnant. By His assembling and gathering, Christ will build His church (Matthew 16:18), but He does so by redeeming the least likely. The previous paragraph in Micah shows the Lord bringing together a holy nation. Here from the very weak He makes a strong nation. (Note *nation* is singular. This does not prove it is Israel, but it makes a contrast, which distinguishes this specific nation from the converted Gentiles just mentioned.) The picture is as eschatological as 4:1-5, but the future has begun as a new Israel comes to Christ. That element is tantalizing to consider, but the undeniable theme is the lifting up of the downtrodden. *“For thus says the One who is high and lifted up, who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: ‘I dwell in the high and holy place, and also with him who is of a contrite and lowly spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly, and to revive the heart of the contrite’”* (Isaiah 57:15).

The Biblical theme continues in the words of the apostle:

“For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God” (1 Corinthians 1:26-29).

The high and holy Lord chose Mary to be the mother of our Lord. This peasant virgin spoke of her humble beginnings,

“He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts; he has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate; he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his offspring forever” (Luke 1:51-55).

4:12 But they do not know the thoughts of the LORD; they do not understand his plan, that he has gathered them as sheaves to the threshing floor.

This is somewhat off topic. This text is not eschatology, but impinges upon it. The time referred to was in Micah's day, yet the words, *“... they do not understand his plan...”* are instructive and needed. The observing eye could see only the Assyrian threat, but there is a plan God has. In Isaiah 29 God brought Jerusalem low; in great danger they pleaded for mercy (vv. 1-4). But then with His plan revealed, the Lord of hosts fulfilled it and crushed the foreign foes which fought against Mount Zion (vv.5-8). So it is with every event on earth. All apparent setbacks fall within that plan, every persecution, and every challenge of false doctrine. We have the full revelation of God for all our days until the Lord appears. If we will live by faith, we will draw our conclusions from God's Word. He has told us all we need in order to live with understanding. God's plan is known to God, and all that He would have us understand comes by His Word. With it we dwell on the coming of Christ and the certainty that every word of God will be fulfilled. Those without God do not know His plan.

5:2-5a But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days. ³ Therefore he shall give them up until the time when she who is in labor has given birth; then the rest of his brothers shall return to the people of Israel. ⁴ And he shall stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God. And they shall dwell secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth. ⁵ And he shall be their peace ...

Verse 2 in this text was fulfilled with the birth of Christ. That God will give them up is a surprise. (Much more on chapter 5 appears in the Appendix A, Micah 5:1-6) But the statement, that after His birth *“the rest of his brothers shall return to the people of Israel”*, declares a great salvation result. That we are His brothers applies to every believer according to Hebrews 2:11,12 and 17. We might expect Micah 5:3 to say they shall return to the Lord, but God is committed to His own policies. He has a people and every convert loyal to Him returns to the people of Israel. The only body on earth that has every saved person, Jew or Gentile, is the church that belongs to Christ. In this a paradox emerges, because there is no longer Jew or Gentile. Galatians 3:26-29 shows that in Christ there is neither Jew nor Gentile. But it also shows the expansion of the united **people of God** in Christ. I write this as one immersed in Western culture, where a multitude of professing Christians considers being part of a Christian congregation optional. One enormous consequence of the first coming of Christ is that all of Messiah’s redeemed brothers including Gentiles become part of the people of Israel, an Israel so expanded that it reaches to the ends of the earth (Psalm 59:13), just as His greatness will.

5:5 *continued* **5:6** When the Assyrian comes into our land and treads in our palaces, then we will raise against him seven shepherds and eight princes of men; ⁶ they shall shepherd the land of Assyria with the sword, and the land of Nimrod at its entrances; and he shall deliver us from the Assyrian when he comes into our land and treads within our border.

This text makes us note that the Old Testament presents things in terms of the day a prophecy was given. Thus, for example, Daniel 12:4 hints about our modern age that *“Many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall increase.”* In Micah 5:5,6 there is a victory over Assyria within the land of Judah. But now Micah speaks of an attack in enemy territory by the new Ruler of Israel, stated as the victory of a sword. (See Appendix A.) Thus the enemy is not merely rebuffed; he is conquered and ruled. The words *“He shall deliver us”* is a statement about Christ Who works through His seven shepherds and eight princes. They go to the homeland of the enemy and they rule over them there. It is one thing to be spared from a foe, it is another for that foe to be converted and turned into a brother. Micah 5 gives us the birth of Christ in Bethlehem elaborating that *“He shall stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the Lord ... He shall be great to the ends of the earth”* (v.4). How does this happen? The representatives of the Lord go everywhere with a message that brings the foreign foe under the rule of Christ. They come to recognize him. His cohorts use the sword of the Spirit (Ephesians 6:17), and thus the advance of the gospel is successful; the nations will come (4:1-5). Later Christ, made the matter clearer, the growth of the kingdom will be like a tree that began as a tiny seed (Matthew 13:31,32), and like yeast penetrating all of the flour (Matthew 13:33). Assyria and its modern counterparts cannot stand up against the power of God’s word and gospel. It penetrates their kingdom and God’s kingdom grows. The nations are promised to Christ in Psalm 2, and they will be delivered. All authority has been given to Christ Who is with His servants till the end of the age (Matthew 28:18-20). God’s saving gospel cannot be frustrated.

5:7-9 Then the remnant of Jacob shall be in the midst of many peoples like dew from the LORD, like showers on the grass, which delay not for a man nor wait for the children of man. 8 And the remnant of Jacob shall be among the nations, in the midst of many peoples, like a lion among the beasts of the forest, like a young lion among the flocks of sheep, which, when it goes through, treads down and tears in pieces, and there is none to deliver. 9 Your hand shall be lifted up over your adversaries, and all your enemies shall be cut off.

The faithful remnant will be everywhere even far from home. The imagery changes from the sword, though the aggressive activity of conquest remains. God's hand is still lifted up in conflict (v.9), and His remnant are like lions loose in a flock of helpless sheep. Sheep are no match for lions. However, "though the wrong seems off so strong, God is the Ruler yet." In a very different analogy, the Holy Spirit has Micah write of dew and rain. Dew forms all over a field. Until the sun rises there is no dry spot on the ground. This is another way to view the relentless spread of the gospel. It is a pervasive penetration. "...*The remnant of Jacob shall be among the nations, in the midst of many peoples.*" The encouraging success Micah reveals takes on angles that are strong, effective, overwhelming, and conquering in the widespread presence of God's remnant among the nations. Just as no offensive weapon against the church can succeed (Isaiah 54:17), no opposition to God can successfully defend against the Christ Who takes captivity captive. The Lord born in obscure Bethlehem has ascended into heaven gloriously and has taken prisoners with Him (Ephesians 4:8) from the enemy.

7:8-10 Rejoice not over me, O my enemy; when I fall, I shall rise; when I sit in darkness, the LORD will be a light to me. 9 I will bear the indignation of the LORD because I have sinned against him, until he pleads my cause and executes judgment for me. He will bring me out to the light; I shall look upon his vindication. 10 Then my enemy will see, and shame will cover her who said to me, "Where is the LORD your God?" My eyes will look upon her; now she will be trampled down like the mire of the streets.

This paragraph shows how Jerusalem will respond to the taunts of its enemies. Gentiles, gloating over the plight of the Jews, could mock them about their status as prisoners, and rub it in by asking, "*Where is the LORD your God?*" as if Israel did not have one. Though my focus is eschatology, and this text is not obviously in that theme, it gives a reply Israel could use, when everything is reversed by God. The tormenting nations are all gone: Assyria, Babylon, the Medes and Persians, the Greeks, and Romans. Israel has been preserved and shall be. The reason lies in the nature of God's covenant. Jerusalem and Judah sinned without repentance, and God's covenantal threats became His covenantal chastening. Having learned its lesson, Jerusalem with God-granted repentance, confesses the propriety of "*the indignation of the LORD*". Israel was faithless, but God did not change. And in His faithfulness the promises made to Abraham and the fathers will be kept (7:20). The message here is that Israel will emerge from their blindness and the wrath of God.

This has not changed. It is a key to the salvation of Israel today. After His indignation the LORD brought Israel out to the light. This has begun again.

"Through ... [Israel's] trespass salvation has come to the Gentiles ... God has power to graft [Israelites] in again ... a partial hardening has come upon Israel ... And in this way all Israel will be saved ... the Deliverer will come from Zion, he will banish ungodliness from Jacob; and this will be my covenant with them when I take away their sins." (taken from Romans 11:11-32) "*... In my wrath I struck you, but in my favor I have had mercy on you*" (Isaiah 60:10).

The salvation of a great number of Jews will have a huge impact on the world. It will be like life from the dead (Romans 11:15). And now a paragraph that is clearly eschatological.

7:11-13 A day for the building of your walls! In that day the boundary shall be far extended. 12 In that day they will come to you, from Assyria and the cities of Egypt, and from Egypt to the River, from sea to sea and from mountain to mountain. 13 But the earth will be desolate because of its inhabitants, for the fruit of their deeds.

Often the prophets, as in Isaiah 22:5, predicted the destruction of the city walls. Now in a great reversal “in that day” a new enclosure will be built. This is not for defense against enemies, because the boundaries will be extended to make room for former enemies. They will come as insiders not invaders. This is a radical change from what Israel used to experience. The foreigners will even build the walls for their hosts, when nations come to Israel’s light. “...*They all gather, they come to you ...*” (Isaiah 60:3,4,10). They come because the Lord gleans them and with His trumpet calls them (Isaiah 27:12,13). The inhabitants of the earth that refuse to come will experience the fruit of their deeds. Turning down the divine invitation results in destruction. Coming to the people and the enlarged of Israel is coming to the Lord. The texts of Micah and Isaiah (contemporary prophets) point to a coming to Israel and Israel’s Lord. In that day the two are distinguishable but inseparable.

7:14-17 Shepherd your people with your staff, the flock of your inheritance, who dwell alone in a forest in the midst of a garden land; let them graze in Bashan and Gilead as in the days of old. 15 As in the days when you came out of the land of Egypt, I will show them marvelous things. 16 The nations shall see and be ashamed of all their might; they shall lay their hands on their mouths; their ears shall be deaf; 17 they shall lick the dust like a serpent, like the crawling things of the earth; they shall come trembling out of their strongholds; they shall turn in dread to the LORD our God, and they shall be in fear of you.

The Lord Jesus Christ will shepherd His flock (5:4). They are His inheritance, and from Him they receive Him as an inheritance. A final exodus is repeated in a mega-scale depiction of coming to the Promised Land. Back then they saw marvelous things with God’s people delivered and His enemies crushed. Those works and wonders will be overshadowed when with finality God will subdue His enemies and theirs. The Egyptian Pharaoh and his army ended up down in the depths of the sea. The nations will be ashamed of their military might and the way they used it. In the awesome presence of God they succumb in abject fear. The blasphemy of their mouths ceases, and it will no longer be welcomed in their ears. The magnitude of this judgment of the nations can only occur when the Son of Man comes in His glory (Matthew 25:31-46), when “*the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire ...*” (2 Thessalonians 1:7,8), when men in fear call for the rocks and mountains to fall on them (Revelation 6:12-17), when He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty (Revelation 19:11-21), when the final battle ends with the Great White Throne judgment (Revelation 20:7-15).

7:18-20 Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity and passing over transgression for the remnant of his inheritance? He does not retain his anger forever, because he delights in steadfast love. 19 He will again have compassion on us; he will tread our iniquities underfoot. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea. 20 You will show faithfulness to Jacob and steadfast love to Abraham, as you have sworn to our fathers from the days of old.

From the hymn **Great God of Wonders**

Who is a pardoning God like Thee?
Or who has grace so rich and free?

The great God Who punishes sin is the same Lord Who pardons the iniquity of the remnant. In some way He can have compassion on us. It is never by His having an accommodation with or passing over our sin. To rid us of just charges for our transgressions, He must subject the guilty to His holy anger, a justice we could never endure. Knowing our sinful nature and all the sins that come from it, He still promised that He would be the God of Abraham and Jacob. In His steadfast love He would need to make us presentable to Himself, because God cannot long endure being the God of sinners. Yet the LORD has never wavered in His determination to be our God. The pardon He procured, the sins He would cast into the sea, and the anger He pours on the guilty was all taken up and provided for by our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 5:21). The Ruler of Israel born in Bethlehem would take on our entire burden and die for us in our place, so that the Lord God of Israel could be the God of His people, and we could be that people in such a way that Christ is not ashamed to call us His brothers. (Hebrews 2:10,11)

I have written this paper to encourage others that our labors are not in vain in the Lord (1 Corinthians 15:58). The nations shall come to the true God, the God of Israel. The lame will be taken in and those who are far off (Acts 2:39). The Lord's servants will declare His glory among the nations (Psalm 96:3) as His own spread to the ends of the earth, even in the lands of former oppressors. God is serious about His plans. A converted Israel will be included in the nations that come to the house of the God of Jacob.

~~~~~

## **Appendix A**

### **Notes on Micah 5:1-6**

Rev. David H. Linden, March, 2017

University Presbyterian Church, Las Cruces, New Mexico, USA

---

These notes are unusual. In teaching Nahum and Micah I have provided no written notes to my class, but this time I have felt compelled to do so. I have written them because this passage is such a vital revelation from God, that it deserves much careful review. These notes are provided to encourage meditation on this very special text.

The chief source of my study has been A Commentary on Micah by Bruce K. Waltke (published by Eerdmans). This volume is not recommended for those who have not had the privilege to study Hebrew and Greek. The author's vocabulary even in English is taxing, as is the structure of many sentences. Nevertheless, I have found this labor of love by our elderly brother (born in 1930) very helpful. I cannot write these notes without acknowledging his contribution.

## The text in the ESV:

- 5:1** Now muster your troops, O daughter of troops; siege is laid against us; with a rod they strike the judge of Israel on the cheek.
- 2 But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days.
- 3 Therefore he shall give them up until the time when she who is in labor has given birth; then the rest of his brothers shall return to the people of Israel.
- 4 And he shall stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God. And they shall dwell secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth.
- 5 And he shall be their peace.
- 5:5** *continued* When the Assyrian comes into our land and treads in our palaces, then we will raise against him seven shepherds and eight princes of men;
- 6 they shall shepherd the land of Assyria with the sword, and the land of Nimrod at its entrances; and he shall deliver us from the Assyrian when he comes into our land and treads within our border.

## Dr. Waltke's Translation:<sup>1</sup>

- 5:1** Now marshall yourself [as a troop], Troop-like Daughter;  
a siege has been set against us.  
With a scepter they strike on the cheek  
Israel's ruler.
- 5:2** But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah,  
an insignificant [town] to be among the clans of Judah,  
from you on my behalf he will come forth  
to be a ruler over Israel;  
and his origin will be from of old,  
from days long ago.
- 5:3** (Therefore, he [the LORD] will give them up  
until the time [when] she who brings forth will bear [the child],  
and [when] the rest of his brothers  
will return to the sons of Israel.)
- 5:4** And he will stand forth and shepherd [his flock]

---

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Waltke prefers to give the LORD's name as I AM. I do not object. His reasons are good, but I have chosen to maintain the more common term found in most English Bibles.

in the strength of the LORD,  
in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God;  
and they will live securely  
because now he will become great  
to the ends of the earth.

**5:5** And he will be the one of peace.  
As for Asshur, when he penetrates into our country,  
and when he marches through our lands,  
then we will raise up against him seven shepherds,  
even eight sheiks.

**5:6** And they will shepherd the land of Asshur with a sword,  
and the land of Nimrod with a drawn sword.  
And so he will deliver [us] from Asshur  
when he penetrates into our country,  
and when he marches through our territory.

### The Structure of Three Oracles, 4:9 – 5:1

Three oracles are linked together. Each presents a problem and a solution in that order. For all three the threat is the siege mounted by Assyria. Every time, the nation is addressed as “Daughter”. All begin with ‘now’. In ancient writings they did not underline or highlight, change fonts, change sizes, make bold or create italics. They did not use numbers or letters to form the structure of the writing, as I have below. Instead of modern devices they used words (such as “now” repeated three times), and they arranged their sentences with deliberate patterns. Here are more in this text:

- A. 4:9,10 two verbs (writhe and groan)  
Daughter of Zion at the beginning of the solution
- B. 4:11-13 two verbs (arise and thresh)  
Daughter of Zion at the beginning of the solution
- C. 5:1-5 (or 5:1-4) one verb (muster)  
Daughter of troops at the outset of the problem.

By switching to Daughter of troops, a change is indicated, while a parallel is maintained. In A and B the problem and the saving answer are of fairly equal space. In C the salvation of the nation is very pronounced with the bulk of the oracle devoted to it. In C a major prediction of our Lord Jesus Christ is the chief substance of the expanded oracle. This is the portion of Micah that now occupies the rest of this paper.

In 722 BC Assyria removed the capital of Israel, Samaria (1:6,7). Then Sennacherib, the King of Assyria, thought in 701 BC that Jerusalem was in the bag. I urge your reading of Isaiah 36 & 37 for the history of this crucial event in the history of God's people. See also 2 King 18 & 19.

**5:1** To muster troops is to organize them for battle, with the apparent goal of defending Jerusalem by attacking the besieging Assyrian army. This of course the weakened forces in Jerusalem could never do. It would be like a mosquito stopping an elephant. The Assyrian army was noted for its discipline and success (Isaiah 5:26-30). Why then say the troops of the Daughter of troops should be mustered? It was a way to say that the Assyrians would be obliterated, though Jerusalem's mustered army would see only the results. The Lord said He would be at their head (2:12,13) and would break through. The promise is stated in military terms, but the LORD had His own assault in mind for Sennacherib's forces. The *arise and thresh* of 4:13 is akin to *muster* in 5:1. Micah's prophesy of the siege by Assyria would soon be visible to the eye.

To hit anyone in the face is humiliating. The dynasty of David had come to this disgrace at the hand of Assyria. No one needed to reach for the cheek of Hezekiah literally; the text uses figurative language. Those who paid attention to Micah's message would see that the vivid point of 5:1 is accurate.

**5:2** The pattern of the three oracles is plight followed by rescue. The rest of the paragraph is of God's deliverance. The judges of Israel were shamed and discredited. God had in mind a different ruler for Israel. It is Jesus Christ, the Son of David, who was born in the town here identified by name, Bethlehem. We should not miss that the Daughter of Zion is Jerusalem. But God has a surprise in that from an obscure village would come the Savior, who was not born in the city where the big shots lived, but from a place so insignificant it is not named in Joshua 15's 63 verses on the distribution of the land of Judah. Bethlehem was too little to be mentioned as part of the clans of Judah.

But Bethlehem in the region of Ephrathah in the territory of Judah is mentioned in connection with David, "Now David was the son of an Ephrathite of Bethlehem in Judah, named Jesse ..." (1 Samuel 17:12). That background was well known to Israel in Micah's day. Samuel anointed a God-fearing youth as King of Israel. He had the lowly task of being a literal shepherd. When Samuel called on Jesse to see which of his eight sons was chosen by God only seven were present. The absent son was the one God's prophet was waiting for in 1 Samuel 16. So the least expected from a not so important town was the choice of God. How like 1 Corinthians 1:26-29 this is. In that same town Christ was born in a stable and visited by shepherds, while high angels praised God for His action.

What Micah is doing is showing that the old David (a moral failure) was to be replaced by the new David. Old Israel would be replaced by a new Israel, composed of all the sons of Abraham who believe. These admitted by faith eschew the idolatry of the old and by the Holy Spirit cling to the eternal Son of David enthroned at the Father's right hand. The history of the first David who united all Israel under his rule will be played out by the second David Who "shall come forth *for me* who is to be ruler in Israel". He is God's chosen, God's anointed, which means He is the Christ. (Messiah and Christ are the same word in Hebrew and Greek respectively.)

Waltke's translation of the end of v.2 is "and his origin will be from of old, from days long ago." This is a flashback to the time of the original David. The One Who will be ruler 'for me', says the LORD, will, as in a time of Israel's first David, have a birth in the same town. In other words both men enter through the same portal to rule Israel. The parallel continues; Jesus was born in obscurity; only shepherds visited; later magi from another land came with gifts. Joseph and Mary were so poor they offered pigeons or turtledoves for the required sacrifice (Luke 2:22-24, based on Leviticus 12). The contempt for Christ as an adult included the connection He had with lowly Galilee (John 7:53). The servant of the Lord who would be high, lifted up, and exalted (Isaiah 52:13) would grow up before the LORD like a root out of dry ground (Isaiah 53:2).

**5:3** The LORD would give up Israel while His people would endure life under Gentile rule – life under Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians, Greeks, and a long time under the Romans. None of these heathen knew "the thoughts of the LORD" (4:12), but the thinking of the LORD was fixed on an entrance into the world via Bethlehem, and a rule which Caesar Augustus laid on the whole world made Joseph and Mary head for Bethlehem. The remnant people of Israel would be the vehicle of His entrance.

The godly nation was in labor, and the One sent came. A lovely result of the painful labor and holy entrance was the return of the King's brothers. The new Israel was being reunited under this King. The chaff and grain would be separated (Luke 3:17), as the remnant of true Israel would come under the rule of the Son of David. This involves nothing less than conversion and salvation from sin. With the atonement offered to God during Jesus' first coming, salvation would begin to extend to the Gentiles in large numbers, as predicted in 4:2-5 and Psalm 2:8.

**5:4** In many places in the Old Testament the word shepherd is a synonym for a ruler, as seen throughout Ezekiel 34. The climax of that prophecy asserts, "I [the Father speaking] will rescue my flock; they shall no longer be a prey. And I will judge between sheep and sheep. And I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them: he shall feed them and be their shepherd" (Ezekiel 34: 22,23). The Lord Jesus told us that He is that good Shepherd (John 10).

There is a King in Israel (4:9). He does not stand above His flock to fleece it or eat it. He takes His assigned role as the gracious provision of the Father to shepherd it. Imagine a shepherd actually shepherding His flock! This includes guarding it from all danger so they can dwell securely. In this model of care, the Lord's elders and ministers in every congregation are to shepherd. The sheep must be fed the Word of God according to the Chief Shepherd (John 21:15-17). In every danger His rod and His staff bring comfort (Psalm 23:4).

Unlike those faithless sons of David who trusted in Egypt, and even in Assyria and Babylon, men who sacrificed their children to cruel demons, the new Son of David would rule in the strength of the LORD "in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God." This will be a successful service for the LORD, and so the man of lowly birth in the town of David, and brought up in the obscure village of Nazareth, would be exalted by His Father. He would be great to the ends of the earth.

This is how the nations will come; with regenerate hearts they choose to come under His rule (4:3).

**5:5** “And he shall be their peace.” This brief word creates a small dilemma. Should it be the conclusion of the preceding paragraph, or the beginning of a new one? The answer is that it is a bridge between both. First, His flock shall dwell securely (5:4). That is real shepherding. This peace is of such a nature that it shows His grace to the ends of the earth. To know Him is to love Him. Those who suffer in false religion have a multitude of rules, have burdens forever upon them, and they follow gods who do not love them. Their sins are ever with them. The extreme in Canaanite religion was to sacrifice children to appease the bloodthirsty lust of a false god. In a tremendous contrast, the real God sacrificed His Son on the cross to bear the penalty of sins He never committed, but we did. Our God is a giving, providing Father (Romans 8:32), joined in grace by His Son, Who is exactly like Him (Hebrews 1:3), and by their Spirit, Who executes the salvation of the Lord right here at ground level in our hearts. This gospel was predicted to spread to the ends of the earth, and it already has. All those who are joined to Christ are joined to each other in a unity found nowhere else. It reaches into every land, language, and culture. Jesus Christ is the only effective peace in this world.

Secondly, He shall bring peace in another sense. The earlier use of peace was as a personal benefit to those who receive Him. But peace is not peace if the activity of our enemies is not put down. Shepherds not only feed their flock, they also use their hardwood staffs on the heads of wolves. Thus the oppressor who would dare to enter the land God had promised to His people would be driven out of Israel’s land and even conquered in their own. But now we have entered the message of 5:6.

**5:6** Here is the implied commission to take up resistance. Assyria was God’s tool to punish unfaithful Israel, yet its carnage and pillage were evil. Outside the walls of Jerusalem God personally drove them away without using His people as agents. But deliberate enemies they were, so the Lord arranged Sennacherib’s murder at the hands of his sons in the shrine of his false god. The poor Assyrian monarch never bowed in repentance before the true and living God, Whose lived in and protected His temple in Jerusalem. There we see the shepherding intervention of the Anointed One at work before His entrance into the world in shall we say, “O little town of Bethlehem”.

There is another feature in Micah 5 that reveals an important detail of how the true Ruler of Israel functions. Christ has a team of surrogates! They are pictured as sword wielding shepherds who deliver God’s people from those who would consume them, and with divine authority they carry the battle right to the homeland of the oppressors. Assyria would be opposed in the land of Israel. God’s agents would invade Assyria.

This opens a can of Biblical themes. Our chief sword is God’s Word, not platitudes, such as “we send you our thoughts and prayers.” The Shepherd has shepherds who wage war by godly means:

“For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ ...” (2 Corinthians 10:3-5)

1 Peter 5:1-11 speaks to the issue in Micah 5:5,6. Christ is the chief Shepherd Whose elders are commanded to shepherd the flock. With a strong call for humility in both people and rulers, authority is extended by Christ and exercised by his shepherds, “...shepherd the flock of God ... exercising oversight ...” Our adversary, the devil, prowls around seeking to devour. “Resist him, firm in your faith ...” Satan has a dual strategy: tempting to sin, and destroying the faith. True shepherds are wise to his methods and aims. “... We are not ignorant of his devices” (2 Corinthians 2:11).

In Ephesians 4:8-16, the apostle with military imagery presents Christ as the One who ‘led captivity captive’. After that conflict He gave servants to edify the body of Christ. This results in ‘unity of the faith’ and knowledge of the Son of God. By speaking God’s truth we resist the latest fads in doctrine as well as old pernicious deceits.

This is how the elders of Christ shepherd the land of Assyria and the land of Nimrod with the sword. We battle sin and false teaching whenever it enters, and we resist it where it originates, as the surrogates of Christ resist the devil and his agents. Divinely placed enmity is here (Genesis 3:15), and though the brief battle involves suffering for us, we are nevertheless “called ... unto his eternal glory” (1 Peter 5:9-11).

The church shall succeed. Jeremiah 31:34 assures us that the day will come (the Second Coming) when His agents will no longer need to teach their neighbors to know the Lord (our current duty), because every soul outside hell, and remaining on earth will know Him with all their sins forgiven. According to the promise of God we shall see new heavens and a new earth where only righteousness will dwell (2 Peter 3:13).

*Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is well pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.*

*(Hebrews 13:20,21)*

## Appendix B

### **A Word on the Famous Text of Micah 6:6-8**

*David H. Linden University Presbyterian Church, Las Cruces, New Mexico April, 2017*

**Micah 6:6-8** "With what shall I come before the LORD, and bow myself before God on high? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? 7 Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?" 8 He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?

This, the most quoted text in all of Micah, is one often misunderstood. The stream of questions in verses 6 and 7 are not questions Micah has. They reveal the kind of thinking of some, maybe many, in Micah's day. The speaking format is a dialogue between two people, one of whom is addressed in v.8 "He has told you, O man...". We use that device too as a way to get a point across. Whenever you hear anyone say, "Suppose this guy comes up to you and says such and such? Such questions are from a hypothetical man. Just as here in Micah 6:6,7.

It is important to understand that these questions are from a person with no knowledge of the grace of God. Does the God of grace demand the things suggested in order to receive that person into His fellowship? Such questions do not really expect an answer. They lack humility and have a "smart aleck" tone to them, as if to say, "Let me ask the questions; I'll stump the experts." I wonder if the words "God on high" in v.6 are sincere, yet the holy name of God is used. (LORD = Yahweh.)

There is also an ascending value to the things suggested. Year old calves are worth more than an older animal offered. Animals were used in the Mosaic rituals, but no one was ever expected to come up with thousands of rams. (Note not one thousand, but multiple thousands.) But the numbers escalate to ten thousands of, (now why "rivers"?) rivers of oil – how extreme, how deliberately exaggerated. The idea that the God of Israel would ever require such offerings is preposterous. What kind of hard-to-please-ogre is He? Then the questions, already bizarre, dip into the immoral religion of the Canaanites by suggesting that perhaps God wants a human sacrifice, the "fruit of my body" as if God can be bought. That one is the most repugnant question of all. These are not the words of a sincere seeker.

Before the answer from God in v.8, note that it had been given before but not heeded. We should review Micah's messages in chapter 2 about how the corrupt courts operated, and how the corrupt clergy spoke. Everyone had his price. Micah appealed for justice in all the nation's institutions and for the proper treatment of one's neighbor. However, they sinned whenever they had the opportunity (2:1). They indulged in legal larceny, cruelly taking away a man's inheritance and home. The evil was so great, that God by His prophet described it as tearing the skin off His people (3:2). It was a scene of widespread murder (3:10; 7:2). It seems a waste of words to say that such abuse was not loving. They had love, but it was a love of evil (3:2) not their neighbor.

Now add to this all the idolatry (1:7; 5:13) that infested Judah coming from Israel, their northern neighbor (6:16), which resulted in sorceries (5:12), and an inability to hear further revelation from God (3:6,7). The questions raised about what is needed to approach God have the insidious inference that He is an unreasonable tyrant. This of course would be an excuse for not worshiping Him – better to shop around for a more understanding god. Plenty were available, all congenial to the desires, lusts, and thinking of man, the kind of god they could well prefer.

In light of the spiritual darkness that infested the people of Judah and Jerusalem, what does the Lord require but doing justice and loving the kindness they should show to their neighbors, which is not the same as doing evil well (7:3). Graciousness undergirds our duty to man. The Lord added that His covenant people should walk humbly with Him, a duty to the Lord God Who had claimed them as His people.

Whatever is meant by doing justice and loving kindness is laid out in detail by the prophet. The good required cannot be understood well without reference to all seven chapters of Micah. It is the radical distortion of what it means “to walk humbly with your God” that begs for our attention. Micah refers to Him as “your God”; a covenantal relation is implied. The covenantal combination of *He is our God* and *we are His people* is in view. If He is our God then all other beings which might pretend to such an honor are false. He is not our God if we have another one, let alone a multitude of deities.

Then there is the nature of God as well. His real nature is obscured by the implied ridicule that underlies the four questions in vv. 6 & 7. The real God is described in the last paragraph of this prophesy.

Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity and passing over transgression for the remnant of his inheritance? He does not retain his anger forever, because he delights in steadfast love. He will again have compassion on us; he will tread our iniquities underfoot. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea. You will show faithfulness to Jacob and steadfast love to Abraham, as you have sworn to our fathers from the days of old (Micah 7:18-20).

Many use Micah 6:6-8 to proclaim social justice with understandings drawn from their cultural preferences. To walk humbly with the God of Israel, with no alternative to Him permitted, is just and proper and fitting and right. The text is greatly abused if the real identity of God is overlooked or dismissed. Some hanker only after the “doing justice and loving kindness” section of the answer. The justice in mind could be construed these days as certain legislation, or more distribution of food stamps, or forgiving college loans, or granting civil rights to those who choose an ungodly life. You would think this text has been printed on a rubber sheet. Micah shows justice all through his prophesy.

Walking humbly with our God is the opposite of bidding for His acceptance. Rather it is a humble acceptance from God of the gift of pardon, relief from guilt, accepting His compassion, and hating what He hates. That is repentance. Apart from our despicable faithfulness, we may rest in His promise of free forgiveness, of eternal life, of being received as sons and daughters, of the Holy Spirit to begin faithfulness and obedience in our hearts where before none existed. The hypothetical man with his terrible questions assumed a stance of producing and giving, when the gospel is about receiving not working. A true walk with God demands a love of our neighbor (Leviticus 19:18).

Yes, the text says what God requires, but it does not even hint that our meeting these requirements is possible or necessary as *the basis* for how we come to God. Rather it is a description of the required life of those received by grace. Grace has free acceptance of sinners who have empty dirty hands. We are in need of a Savior. In the gospel we receive Him (John 1:12). We are not taken in by God because we make an acceptable effort to imitate Christ's holy life. That is pure impossibility making even the offering thousands of rams more plausible. Micah 6:8 simply describes the new life granted to the sinner who believes in the provision of God. Before the insulting questions, God had reviewed “*the saving acts of the LORD*” in 6:3-5. God wanted them to know Him by His redeeming action. They did not offer a gift so that He would deliver them from Egypt, the house of slavery, nor did He require their firstborn sons in sacrifice. Instead He delivered death to the firstborn of Egypt. And for our salvation he does not take our children, instead He has given His Son to be the propitiation for our sins (1 John 4:10; Romans 8:32).

We walk humbly with our God by turning from our sins and from all our supposed righteousness. God has provided an offering by which we may “*come before the Lord.*” It is one He approves, namely the sacrifice our Lord made for us on the cross. That offering has been accepted. We may now come to God on high. To agree with God, to accept His gift, and to trust Him for forgiveness on no other ground begins the way to walk humbly with Him.