

The Restoration of Israel #2

Micah 4:7-8

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In speaking of Israel's future restoration, we not only have addressed the period of time in which this blessed event will occur according to God's Word ("In that day"—What day? In that day referred to in Micah 4:1-4), and we have not only addressed the mercy of God which is glorified and exalted by Israel's restoration ("In that day, saith the LORD, will I assemble her that halteth" i.e. the very one who was married to the Lord and time and time again left the love and security of her faithful husband shall be brought back by God's sovereign and free grace to love and adore Him), but we must also explain the nature of that glorious restoration of Israel to her heavenly Husband.

What kind of a restoration will it be? Purely spiritual or will it also manifest certain national and geographical distinctives? Will Israel be restored to her homeland and live without the threat of aggression or extinction from her enemies? Will Israel's reunion with Christ be one in which she picks up where she left off in rebuilding the temple of Jerusalem that was destroyed in 70 A.D., in reestablishing the Levitical priesthood, and in reinstating the sacrifices of the Old Testament? Will the fullness of Israel's future restoration be different in any way than that of the Gentile nations? Will her restoration bring her into the Visible Church of Jesus Christ or will she maintain some separate and distinct status outside the Church? Such are a sampling of the questions that we will by God's grace seek to answer this Lord's Day. For not every position that maintains a future restoration of Israel presents a biblical view of the nature of Israel's future conversion and glory.

The main points from today's sermon are the following: (1) The Glory of Israel's Restoration; (2) Certain Questions concerning Israel's Restoration Answered; (3) Practical Application from Israel's Restoration.

I. The Glory of Israel's Restoration (Micah 4:7-8).

A. As we consider Israel's Reunion with her Lord, there seem to be two stages to her future restoration that are herein described by the prophet Micah: (1) The Remnant Stage of Israel ("And I will make her that halted a remnant"); and (2) The National Stage of Israel ("and her that was cast far off a strong nation"). For a "remnant" and a "nation" refer to two different stages in Israel's development—a "remnant" signifying a relatively small group of Israelites, and a "nation" signifying a relatively large group of Israelites.

1. First, the Lord indicates that He will gather out of a halting or stumbling people a remnant. Israel halted or stumbled into apostasy at various times in her past history, and the Lord always preserved out of her a small remnant who would faithfully worship Him in purity of heart and purity of doctrine (e.g. listen to the desperate cry of Elijah in Romans 11:3-4; listen also to the curse pronounced upon a fallen and halting Israel at the time of Christ in Matthew 21:42-44). Likewise, Israel presently finds herself not in the stage of national blessing, but rather in the stage of remnant blessing (Romans 11:5-7). This is the first stage mentioned in Micah 4:7.

2. The second stage then moves beyond God's blessing upon a remnant of Israel to emphasize God's blessing upon the nation of Israel. The Lord declares that He will make her that was cast far off "a strong nation" (i.e. a mighty nation). When was Israel to be made "a strong nation?" In a more restricted sense, she did attain a national strength after her return from Babylonian captivity and during the Maccabean period (150 years before the birth of the Lord) when she drove her enemies (such as Syria) out of her land. However, it would appear this restricted fulfillment looks forward to a complete fulfillment which will be realized "in the last days" as stated in Micah 4:1; and "in that day" according to Micah 4:6). The complete fulfillment of Israel's restoration (according to the Apostle Paul in Romans 11) is yet future.

3. Note the language used by Micah to describe Israel's restoration when she is made "a strong nation": "and the LORD shall reign over them in mount Zion from henceforth, even for ever" (Micah 4:7)—this reign of the Lord takes us back to the time referred to in Micah 4:3. Then the Lord also says concerning Israel's future restoration: "unto thee shall it come, even the first dominion, the kingdom shall come to the daughter of Jerusalem" (Micah 4:8)—this seems to indicate that the future reunion of Israel to her Lord will be similar to the blessed rule of Israel in her national capacity under David and Solomon wherein magistrates ruled as God's ordinance, and God's ministers led the people of God in one pure doctrine, worship, and government.

II. Certain Questions concerning Israel's Restoration Answered.

A. Will Israel's future restoration include the rebuilding of the temple, and the reinstatement of her priesthood, sacrifices, feasts, and ceremonies as dispensationalists have taught? Absolutely not!

1. That which was distinctive to the Old Covenant and which passed away with the coming of Christ will not be resurrected in the future. Israel will not go backwards in time when she returns to Christ, but will offer worship to the Lord on the basis of New Covenant revelation (even as will the Gentile nations). The Old Covenant temple, priesthood, and ceremonies were passing, fleeting shadows which were abolished when Christ, the body or substance, appeared (Hebrews 10:1). To rebuild the Old Covenant ceremonies is like returning to a period of childhood in the development of the Church (Galatians 4:3: "the elementary things of the world"). For Israel to return to the Old Covenant (i.e. the baby stage of her development) would be like a young man who is old enough to drive a car returning to his childhood tricycle instead.

2. Furthermore, and most significantly, to return to the Old Covenant is to deny that Christ is our Prophet, Priest, and King (Hebrews 1:1-2). It is in practice to deny the finished work of the Lord Christ upon the cross. It is to trample underfoot the blood of Christ (like Peter in Galatians 2, and like those Jews who had come to Christ and who under persecution were being tempted to return to the outward forms of Judaism in Hebrews 10:29). Jesus Christ is Israel's Great High Priest and thus she needs no earthly priests. The Church of Jesus Christ is the Lord's New Covenant temple and no rebuilt temple is needed (Ephesians 2:19-22). The reading and preaching of God's Word, prayer, the singing of psalms without instrumentation, and the sacraments are our spiritual acts of worship offered to the Lord in the New Covenant. And there is no holy day to be celebrated in the New Covenant except the Lord's Day (Matthew 28:20; Acts 20:7; Revelation 1:10).

3. Is it not significant that Romish worship is in effect a return to Judaism (ornate consecrated temples, an elaborate priesthood, a sacrifice in Communion, incense, instruments and images in worship, and holy days like Christmas and Easter? And how sad it is to see how she is bringing back into her pale (ever so subtly) the very Protestant and Reformed churches that at one time fled from her and for the very reasons that the Protestants cited for leaving Rome in the first place. Thus, any reference in the Old Testament prophecies of Israel's restoration to the ceremonies of the Old Testament are to be understood in terms of worship that is authorized by God (Zechariah 14:16,19— where it also speaks of Gentiles being required to keep the Feast of Tabernacles).

B. Will Israel's future restoration establish her as a distinct and separate entity from the Visible Church of Jesus Christ as is promoted by dispensationalists? Certainly not!

1. Consider the following texts: Ephesians 2:11-22; Ephesians 3:4-6; Romans 11:24.

2. There will be in the last days both a fullness of the Gentiles brought in (as is taught in Micah 4:1-4 and Romans 11:25) and a fullness of Israel brought in (as is taught in Micah 4:6-8 and Romans 11:26), but Israel will be made a Christian nation (like the Gentile nations) and Israel will be in covenant with all Christian nations throughout the world (Isaiah 19:23-25).

C. Will Israel's restoration be spiritual and national or simply spiritual? That is, is it prophesied that

Israel will come to embrace Christ and be gathered together to form a mighty nation under Christ, or is it prophesied that she will only embrace Christ while remaining a scattered people throughout the world. Interestingly, this is a question over which postmillennialists themselves have been divided. I might also mention that our confessional standards do not answer this specific question, and thus it has never been viewed as a test of orthodoxy or faithfulness by Reformed and Presbyterian Churches. Although I do not have the time to go into the detailed arguments offered by faithful teachers on both sides of this issue, I will propose to you some matters for consideration.

1. I do believe the evidence for not only Israel's spiritual restoration, but for her national restoration as well may be gleaned from certain passages.
2. From out text in Micah 4:7-8, it is difficult to avoid national blessings poured forth upon Israel when she returns to Christ.
3. The following New Testament passage seems to infer a national restoration: Luke 21:24.
4. The following Old Testament passage seems to infer a national restoration (during the days of Christ's reign): Ezekiel 37:21-25.
5. James Durham, a minister of the Church of Scotland, and contemporary to men like Gillespie and Rutherford, has noted the following in his commentary on Revelation 16:12:

Neither can that promise made to Israel (Deuteronomy 30:2-4) that whenever they should repent the Lord would gather them from the nations whither they were scattered, and return them to their own land, be thought void and null after Christ's coming, especially considering the general repentance and mourning which is to accompany their conversion. Therefore, it would seem by that promise they may expect their own land, it being a part of God's engagement to the natural seed of Abraham.

D. Is Israel's present occupation within the land of Palestine a fulfillment of these prophecies? I think not, for in these prophecies the restoration of Israel is always applied to Israel in her converted state (Leviticus 26:40-42).

1. Thus, it would be no denial of the position presented herein if Israel were yet overcome by her enemies and if Palestine became the possession of the Arabs for a time.
2. I will say that when Israel is converted (and if national restoration is realized), then her enemies will not occupy or own parts of Jerusalem or parts of her land (as is presently the case).
3. So I would affirm that the present status of unbelieving Israel does not fulfill the prophecies related to her glorious restoration.

III. Practical Application from Israel's Restoration.

A. If God will grant to Israel a restored nation and land in this life, will He not provide for you, His bride, your daily bread (Matthew 6:31-33)?

B. If God will grant to Israel a restored nation and land in this life, will He not grant to you, His bride, spiritual houses, wealth, and family in this life as He has promised (Matthew 19:27-30).

C. The gifts and calling of God are without repentance to Israel (Romans 11:29) in regard to her being called as a nation and being given the gift of a piece of real estate, how much more the heavenly gifts and eternal calling of God are without repentance to God's dear children: heaven (Revelation 21:4).

D. Just as faith in Christ is Israel's only hope of salvation and blessing in the future, so Christ our Mediator is your only hope of salvation. The gospel is not offered to only Jews, but to Jews and Gentiles. The gospel is not offered to the righteous or to the sinless, but those who know they are in need of a Savior. At

Christ's first coming Israel as a people approached close to the altar and boasted in their works of righteousness. At the time of her national conversion, she shall like the publican beat her chest and simply cry out, "God be merciful to me a sinner." Dear ones, don't wait for a more convenient time to come to Christ. Don't think your privileged status in the external covenant insures salvation. Embrace Him by faith alone. For He is the Savior of the world—His elect in all nations.

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