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Our “Health and Wealth” Gospel

Micah 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, 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. 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; 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. 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.

The statement, “A text without a context is a pretext (or an opinion)” communicates an important principle, for the Bible contains many statements which taken out of context can be quite misleading. For

example, listen to the following promise Moses made to the people of God:

Deuteronomy, 30:9a, "...the Lord your God will prosper you abundantly in all the work of your hand..."-

This is the God we serve... a Being who exists to prosper and so to bless man! A similar promise was made to Joshua if he conducted his work in God's way.

Joshua 1:8, "...then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have success."

At Mount Sinai, God gave this promise to His people.

Exodus 15:26, "If you will give earnest heed to the voice of the Lord your God... I will put none of the diseases on you which I have put on the Egyptians; for I, the Lord, am your healer."

In other words, you won't be sick. If you just do it God's way, you'll know good health all the days of your life!

Proverbs 11:25, "The generous man will be prosperous, and he who waters will himself be watered."

What an incredible principle! If you give generously to God, the Lord will in turn give generously to you. And so we read the promise Christ made.

Luke 6:38, "Give, and it will be given to you; good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, they will pour into your lap. For by your standard of measure it will be measured to you in return."

In essence, you can't out-give God. If you will give 20%, 30%, 40% of your income to the Lord, He will by all means give you back many times more.

2 Corinthians 9:6, "...he who sows sparingly shall also reap sparingly; and he who sows bountifully shall also reap bountifully."

From all of these passages it seems clear that it is God's will for us to be healthy, wealthy, and prosperous in this life... or is it? What specifically is meant by these passages? Is it God's will for the Christian in this life to know minimal health related issues, have a bundle of money, and so prosper in business, at home, and in his leisure? If not, then how do we take the many statements in Scripture which seem to indicate that God has planned many blessings for the child of God?

In the book of Micah, the prophet takes this question head-on. Micah was living in a day when the vast majority of prophets were quoting prosperity passages (like the ones I just did) and making grandiose promises to the people of God. Micah observed:

Micah 2:11, "If a man walking after wind and falsehood had told lies *and said*, 'I will speak out to you concerning wine and liquor [two substances which flow in abundance during times of ease; In other words, any who arise and proclaim a message of prosperity...],' he would be spokesman to this

people.”

It was this message that characterized the teaching of the false prophets in Micah’s day. They were everywhere proclaiming the message that if God had anything to do with it, health and wealth lay in Judah’s future! In contrast to these popular preachers Micah’s response was rather straight forward. When he spoke to the blind leaders of God’s people (which included the false prophets) he said this:

Micah 3:12, “Therefore, on account of you [because you do not speak to warn the people to turn from their way such that they persist in their rebellion against God], Zion will be plowed as a field, Jerusalem will become a heap of ruins, and the mountain of the temple *will become* high places of a forest.”

You couldn’t get a greater contrast. Many, many preachers at the time were preaching, “Peace and safety!” Micah was preaching just the opposite. What message was and is the correct one?

Micah didn’t leave that for us to decide. Rather, throughout his ministry he gave many messages addressing the “blessings” that awaited the child of God in Christ; some of these sermons have been preserved in this book. Today we are going to look at one of these and know the true “Health and Wealth” Gospel that is ours in Christ. However, it is important that we all begin on the same page, and so I want first to discuss with you “The Redemptive Context” of Micah under three headings.

Creation

When God created the world He established it as His Kingdom.

Genesis 1:27-28, “And God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. And God blessed them; and God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.’”

When God created this world, He established a Kingdom over which He deigned to rule with man! We were created distinct from the rest of creation to co-reign and co-rule with the Lord. Yet not all was as it should be in Paradise, for in the garden walked a deceiver. Isaiah 14 speaks of Lucifer, one of the most glorious angels which God had created.

Isaiah 14:12-15, “How you have fallen from heaven, O star of the morning, son of the dawn! You have been cut down to the earth, you who have weakened the nations! But you said in your heart, ‘I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God, and I will sit on the mount of assembly in the recesses of the north. I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.’ Nevertheless you will be thrust down to Sheol, to the recesses of the pit.”

At some point in creation, the most glorious angel that God ever created rebelled against God. He looked around and saw that no other thing in creation was as glorious as himself and so wondered why he wasn’t worshipped like God. Accordingly, he rebelled against God bringing with him a third of the host of heaven (Revelation 12:4). He was angry over God’s refusal to share His glory. Lucifer, this fallen angel endeavored to hurt God, such that he attempted to allure God’s most treasured possession, man, to rebel

against God.

The Fall

Genesis 3:1-3, “Now the serpent was craftier than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said to the woman, ‘Indeed, has God said, “You shall not eat from any tree of the garden”?’ And the woman said to the serpent, ‘From the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat; but from the fruit of the tree which is in the middle of the garden, God has said, “You shall not eat from it or touch it, lest you die.”’”

Genesis 3:6-7, “When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make *one* wise, she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loin coverings”:

What a sad day! With the rebellion of man, God’s Kingdom was destroyed and the world now became the dominion of Satan (cf. Luke 4:5-6; Revelation 11:15). Yet it wasn’t all doom and gloom.

Promise of Redemption

Genesis 3:14-15, “And the Lord God said to the serpent, ‘Because you have done this, cursed are you more than all cattle, and more than every beast of the field; on your belly shall you go, and dust shall you eat all the days of your life; and I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head, and you shall bruise him on the heel.’”

Though Satan won a major victory at the fall (the world became His dominion), the Lord promised that in time He would send a Redeemer who would vanquish the Kingdom of Satan and re-established God’s reign and rule, His Kingdom, on this earth! And family of God, everything from this point forward in the Bible is a description of this vanquishing! One such description is given to us in Exodus 18 following the exodus from Egypt where Moses led 2.5 million people into the wilderness. Recall that Moses was weighed down with the various and sundry issues involved in leading so great a people. Accordingly, his father-in-law, Jethro, suggested Moses organize the people into a nation.

Exodus 18:24-25, “So Moses listened to his father-in-law, and did all that he had said. And Moses chose able men out of all Israel, and made them heads over the people, leaders of thousands, of hundreds, of fifties and of tens.”

This of course was the plan of God such that in organizing Israel into a nation, God would give a foretaste of what living in a Kingdom was like. You must understand: the Old Testament Kingdom of Israel was established NOT as the Kingdom of God on the earth (this would come later). RATHER, it was given to teach all God’s people from this time forth what it means to be a Kingdom of priests (Exodus 19:6)! Now it is important to note that the success and failure of the civil kingdom which Moses established was based solely on the faithfulness of the nation.

Leviticus 26:14-17, “But if you do not obey Me and do not carry out all these commandments, if, instead, you reject My statutes, and if your soul abhors My ordinances so as not to carry out all My

commandments, and so break My covenant, I, in turn, will do this to you: I will appoint over you a sudden terror, consumption and fever that shall waste away the eyes and cause the soul to pine away; also, you shall sow your seed uselessly, for your enemies shall eat it up. And I will set My face against you so that you shall be struck down before your enemies; and those who hate you shall rule over you, and you shall flee when no one is pursuing you.”

The point in all of this is that though individually the child God was saved from the Kingdom of Satan through the coming Redeemer (Jesus Christ), nevertheless as a nation their well-being was connected to their faithfulness as a nation: if they rebelled, they would be destroyed, but if they followed the Lord and served Him, they would endure. What happened? What would become of this nation?

Fast-forward roughly 700 years to the time of Micah and as we see the now divided nation (Israel/Judah) has rebelled against God and so has not fulfilled their side of the bargain. As such, destruction lay in both of their paths. This brings us to the prophetic context of Micah.

Micah 1:6-7a, 16b, “For I will make Samaria [this is the capital city of the northern Kingdom of Israel] 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. All of her idols will be smashed, all of her earnings will be burned with fire, and all of her images I will make desolate... [Skip down to v. 16b where it is clearly stated concerning Israel...] For they [Israel’s children] will go from you into exile.”

The northern Kingdom from the outset rebelled against God. For a little over 200 years, the nation did its own thing such that by the time we get to Micah, the death warrant was signed. In just a few short years following Micah 1, Israel would go into exile at the hands of the Assyrians (722 BC)! And because Judah was fast following the example of Israel, it too was going to fall.

Micah 4:10a, 11, “Writhe and labor to give birth, daughter of Zion, like a woman in childbirth, for now you will go out of the city, dwell in the field, and go to Babylon... And now many nations have been assembled against you who say, ‘Let her be polluted, and let our eyes gloat over Zion.’”

In prophetic foreshadowing, Micah tells of a time with the Babylonians would destroy the Southern Kingdom just as the Assyrians had destroyed the Northern Kingdom. And yet God was working out His Kingdom purposes.

Micah 4:10b, 12a, “Writhe and labor to give birth, daughter of Zion, like a woman in childbirth, for now you will go out of the city, dwell in the field, and go to Babylon. There you will be rescued; there the Lord will redeem you from the hand of your enemies... [Speaking of the exultant Babylonians at the time...] But they do not know the thoughts of the Lord, and they do not understand His purpose...”

You must understand that from the fall onward, God is moving this world to the time when He re-takes the earth and claims it once again as His own. In light of this promise and plan, we take the promises of God regarding our welfare! This clearly was Micah’s message.

The Anticipated “Health, Wealth, and Prosperity” that Awaits God’s People

Micah 4:1a, “And it will come about in the last days [the language places this passage in the Eschaton¹, the end time when God once and for all reclaims this earth from Satan and so establishes His Kingdom on the earth] that the mountain of the house of the Lord will be established as the chief of the mountains...”-

This is Kingdom language. The phrase “the mountain of the house of the Lord” is a reference to the head-quarters of the regency of God. At the time of the writing of Micah, Assyria and then Babylon were the world powers to which every nation in the known world paid tribute and gave homage. But the day would come when world-domination would shift to a mountain peak in Jerusalem called Zion. John speaks of this New Heaven and New Earth.

Revelation 21:10, “And he [the angel who was his guide] carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the holy city, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God.”

This mountain would become “the chief of the mountains” says Micah- which doesn’t mean that it was the tallest (it only stands 2,400 ft. above sea level), but the place from which all the world would be ruled! Listen to the words of the Psalmist who spoke anthropomorphically of the jealousy that the other mountains of the world have of Zion.

Psalm 68:16, “Why do you look with envy, O mountains with *many* peaks, at the mountain which God has desired for His abode? Surely, the Lord will dwell *there* forever.”²

Now according to Jeremiah 51:44 there was a time when all nations and peoples flocked to Babylon because it was the capital city of the world. Such will be the case when the Kingdom of God once again comes to this earth.

Micah 4:1b, “...it [Zion, the head-quarters of God’s reign and rule, the capital city of the world] will be raised above the hills, and the peoples will stream to it³.”

This is where everything in our lives on this earth today is headed! What was a faint whisper throughout much of the Old Testament Micah shouts from the rooftops! God’s Kingdom is coming again to this world! As His subjects and servants, it is for this we live, move, and breathe!

Now you must see that it is on account of this certain future that the Bible is saturated with promises of blessing for God’s people!

Jeremiah 29:11, “‘For I know the plans that I have for you,’ declares the Lord, ‘plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope.’”

Sadly so many false preachers have interpreted this passage as a promise that is realized today, in this state of sin and misery. Yet that is not the ultimate time-reference! Clearly it is speaking about the Last Day, when Christ returns and fully establishes His Kingdom on this earth! We see it in Ezekiel 34 which

speaks of the people of God on the Last Day.

Ezekiel 34:25-26, "And I will make a covenant of peace with them and eliminate harmful beasts from the land, so that they may live securely in the wilderness and sleep in the woods. And I will make them and the places around My hill a blessing. And I will cause showers to come down in their season; they will be showers of blessing."

This is such a glorious truth, yet not one that will be fulfilled ultimately in this age! Yes, prosperity awaits us all in Christ, but not until the end time. And all the wanting and claiming of these promises today will not change God's Redemptive plan!⁴ Peter describes the child of God in these terms.

1 Peter 1:8, "Though you have not seen Him [Christ], you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory."

Yes today we know joy and gladness. But only as we gaze upon Christ and His ultimate plan for us! It is this that fills us with awe; it is this that keeps us going!

2 Corinthians 4:16-18a, "Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day. For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen..."

And thus God wants the longing for the manifestation of this Kingdom to be one of our greatest hopes and treasures in this life. And this is why He taught us to pray accordingly.

Matthew 6:9-10a, "Pray, then, in this way: 'Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come...'"

It is against this backdrop, the coming Kingdom of God, that we interpret the promised blessings given to the child of God in Christ. It is when Christ's Kingdom comes to this earth in its fullness that we will know perfect health, security, wealth, and much, much more. This was Micah's message to the people of God! Now concerning this coming Kingdom, notice some of its characteristics.

Micah 4:2, "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"

The first characteristic of this Kingdom is that it is not shrouded in darkness nor misunderstanding (as it was in Micah's day with the false teachers and blind guides)! Reality will be fully understood and enjoyed, for God's word/law will be that which will govern and guide all man!

Micah 4:3a, "And He will judge between many peoples and render decisions for mighty, distant nations..."

Justice no longer will be something we long for; rather it will be "lived in!" In God's Kingdom, the powerful will not prey on the weak, and the weak will not envy the wealthy; for neither will exist. Life will

be lived in accordance with the word of God such that justice and truth will characterize all of life.

Micah 4:3b, "...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"

It will be an age of never ending peace- no more wars, sorrow, sickness, suffering, or death. Accordingly, iron/steel will be used not for weaponry, but tools with which to co-reign with God over creation (cf. Psalm 46:9)!

Micah 4:4a, "And each of them will sit under his vine and under his fig tree..."

The idea behind this is realized pleasure and utmost contentment. The toil of this creation will be gone as sin no longer will taint the world. No longer will we labor by the "sweat of the brow." The earth will yield its fruit willingly such that we will be able to recline in the shade and enjoy life! L. C. Allen put it this way:

It is an ideal that spells freedom: freedom from hunger and oppression, the free right to one's own property, to be one's own master. The sturdy peasant, relaxing at noon under the cool shade of his fruit trees and quietly surveying his own small holding maintained by honest toil, epitomizes a beautiful ideal of human fulfillment [sic] so often lacked and longed for. (Allen, 1994, p. 326)

Micah 4:4b, "And each of them will sit under his vine and under his fig tree, with no one to make *them* afraid..."

Added to the contentment we shall enjoy is a never threatened security. There no longer will be a devil or an enemy, no one who will steal, murder, rape, or kill. We will live without care or thought for our protection. And lest you think all of this is "pie in the sky" religion, behold this:

Micah 4:4c, "...for the mouth of the Lord of hosts has spoken."

The idea behind this is that all that we have seen is guaranteed! God said it... that settles it! This therefore becomes our glorious hope and that for which we ought to make definite plans on this earth! For this truly is the Christian's hope.

Colossians 1:27, "God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope [the anticipation, the expectation] of glory."

When a person is saved, a hope is conceived in their being which when fed will determine the direction and course of their life! Paul put it this way:

Titus 3:7, "...we [have been] made heirs according to *the* hope of eternal life."

The idea here is that our lives in Christ now revolve around a hope, an anticipation regarding the future! And thus we read of the Christian:

Romans 5:2, "...we exult in hope of the glory of God."

This is our disposition and expectation. We do not look today for paneled houses or vibrant health as a determiner of the will of God to bless us. Rather in Christ, our disposition is one that is looking for the kingdom whose founder and builder is not of this world.

Hebrews 11:13-16, "All these died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance, and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. For those who say such things make it clear that they are seeking a country of their own. And indeed if they had been thinking of that *country* from which they went out, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better *country*, that is a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; for He has prepared a city for them."

It should be obvious that what is being described by Micah here is something that will NOT take place in this age! In fact, we laugh the theologian who wrote of Micah 4 prior to World War II:

We seem to discern in this oracle [a vague foreshadowing] of the order of ideas which has taken form in our days in the League of Nations and proposals for general disarmament. (Allen, 1994, p. 327)

And yet, there is a point to be made. For the Kingdom spoken about by Micah has entered into this world today! John the Baptist, the fore-runner of Christ gave us this message, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matthew 3:2) And the first official message that Christ gave when He entered into the ministry was this:

Mark 1:15, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel."

When Christ came to this world, He came to do one thing; re-establish the Kingdom of God which was lost at the fall! And He did this when He died and rose again from the dead.

Ephesians 1:20-23, "...[God] raised Him from the dead, and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly *places*, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age, but also in the one to come. And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fulness of Him who fills all in all."

When Christ rose from the dead, He rose as the King of kings and Lord of lords. He now reigns in this earth in the hearts of man with the anticipation that someday, the earth once again will become His Kingdom.

Matthew 25:31-34, "But when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne. And all the nations will be gathered before Him; and He will separate them from one another, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats; and He will put the sheep on His right, and the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on His right, 'Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.'"

We live in what is known as the Already/Not Yet Kingdom of God. It is already here in part, and so in part

is enjoyed; yet the fulness is yet to come. Thus while we might enjoy many of the promised blessings in part in this life, we do not look for their fullness to come until the Last Day.

Micah 4:1b, "...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."

This truly is Emmanuel's Land!

Micah 4:5, "Though all the peoples walk each in the name of his god, as for us, we will walk in the name of the Lord our God forever and ever."

What impact will the previous truth have on the child of God- the genuine servant of Christ? As one seeing that he has been called and so commissioned for a purpose which transcends this life, it will make him one who walks in light of the character ("the name") and so the power⁵ of the Lord their God!⁶ In other words, with Micah, today we see that our allegiance, focus, and purpose is God- whose ultimate plan involves the destruction of this world and the re-creation of it into a paradise!

Thus to set our focus and hope in this life on enjoying the benefits which someday will be ours in Christ in eternity is to place the cart before the horse. Yet that is the inclination in this life. We don't so much mind being God-centered in all that we do so long as we know that the God is man-centered in all that He does. Such in essence was the message of the false prophets in Micah's day. Such in essence is the message of the false preachers in our own. The Biblical calling today, taking a page out of the life of Christ when He walked the earth, is this:

John 13:3-4, "...knowing that the Father had given all things into [our] hands, and that [we have] come forth from God, and [are] going back to God, [we rise] from supper, [lay] aside [our] garments; and taking a towel, [we serve!]"

In His name, in His strength, for His glory, according to His word! That is our calling. May God give us the grace so to do!

End Notes

¹ Compare Gaebelein, *Volume 7: Daniel and the Minor Prophets*, EBC and Keil, C. F., & Delitzsch, F., *Commentary on the Old Testament*.

² Compare also Ezekiel 40:2; Zechariah 14:10.

³ Compare Psalm 87; Isaiah 56:6-8; Zechariah 8:21-23; John 12:32; Hebrews 12:22; Revelation 21.

⁴ That was Micah's point in Micah 2:6b!

⁵ Compare 1 Samuel 17:45.

⁶ Compare also 2 Peter 3:11ff; 1 John 3:3.

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About the Preacher

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