

## Who Is Like Thee?

Micah 7:11-20; Proverbs 15:10

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The prophecy of Micah began on a most solemn note wherein the Lord brought a covenant lawsuit against His people for falling away from the pure form of worship instituted by God, for their hypocrisy in going through the mere outward forms of worship while their heart was indifferent to the Lord, for placing their confidence in the wisdom and strength of man rather than in the invincible power of a sovereign God, and for not giving ear to the cry of the poor and the helpless in their midst. Israel and Judah, though united to Jehovah by a marriage covenant, had gone after other lovers in departing from a faithful, loving, righteous (yea, perfect) Husband. Consider this repeated scenario of backsliding in the book of Judges (Israel forsook the Lord, Judges 2:11-13; the Lord delivered them into the hands of their enemies, Judges 2:14-15; the Lord raised up judges to deliver them from their enemies, Judges 2:16; and they forsook the Lord again, Judges 2:17). This is a cycle that is repeated over and over again throughout the period of the judges and throughout Israel's history.

After reading of the repeated acts of spiritual adultery committed against the Lord throughout Israel's history, it's all that we can do to keep from crying out in righteous indignation: "Lord destroy such an unfaithful wife once and for all. She has only shown contempt for Thine abundant covenant love and mercy. Why will Thou continue to show Israel Thy grace?" But even as the words form in our minds, we are reminded that this is precisely the covenant love which Christ has for us, His Bride collectively and individually, every man, woman, and child who has embraced Jesus Christ by faith alone. Dear ones, if it were not for the tender mercies of the Lord in restoring us time and time again after we have wandered from Him in our desires, our plans, our affections, our words, and our actions where would any of us be? With the Apostle Paul we must declare, "We are what we are by the grace of God."

As we come to the close of this prophecy, we are again turned away from trusting in ourselves or anything we might offer the Lord as the basis for our salvation or our sanctification, and we are brought to see that it is the covenant mercies and righteousness of the Lord alone upon which we stand. All other ground upon which we might rest is like quick-sand in which we will sink to our own destruction.

Consider with me the following main points in this concluding sermon from the prophecy of Micah: (1) The Promises of a Restoring God; (2) The Prayer of a Faithful Minister; (3) The Response of a Thankful People.

### **I. The Promises of a Restoring God (Micah 7:11-13,15-17).**

A. The faithful remnant was exhorted in Micah 7:8-10 not to fret themselves because of the multitude or because of the apparent success of those who would hinder the progress of Christ's cause. For even when the remnant seem to fall due to their reduced size or due to the poor hearing and reception of the truth, they must remember that the Lord will cause them to arise again and He will plead the righteous cause for which they have suffered and died.

B. Although Israel was soon to experience the travail of suffering as discipline from the Lord, the Lord gives them reassuring promises of their future restoration. Promises like these have already been made to Israel in previous sections of Micah (e.g. we see two restorations distinguished for which Israel was taught to live in hope: a distant restoration in the time of the Messiah "in the last days" wherein as Paul says in Romans 11:26, "all Israel shall be saved", Micah 4:6-8 cf. Micah 4:1; and a nearer restoration in which Israel would be delivered out of Babylon 70 yrs. after she was led into captivity, Micah 4:9-10).

C. The language of restoration involves rebuilding what has fallen into disrepair and returning to the territory granted to faithful forefathers as we see in Micah 7:11-12. For the walls of Jerusalem that had been destroyed would be rebuilt and the remnant of Israel and Judah would return from Assyria and all fortified cities where they were driven in order to re-establish the temple and its pure worship to God (which was accomplished when the faithful were miraculously delivered from captivity, Isaiah 44:28). In that day the decree of the Assyrians, Babylonians, or Medes and Persians that in any way hindered God's remnant from returning to their inheritance and rebuilding Jerusalem and the temple shall be removed far away from God's people—that decree shall lose its power and authority to retain God's people any longer in captivity.

D. Although for the time being there shall be desolation in the land for the unfaithfulness of Israel as a whole (Micah 7:13), nevertheless, God speaks of a future period in which He would bring about a wondrous deliverance, similar to that of Israel's deliverance from Egypt (Micah 7:15-17). The northern kingdom of Israel had been led into captivity by the Assyrians in about 722 B.C. and their kingdom was demolished. The southern kingdom of Judah likewise was led into captivity by the Babylonians in about 586 B.C. and their kingdom was destroyed just as the walls of Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed. It appeared to the whole world at that time that Israel and Judah as a national entity had been forever erased from the face of the earth. But the Lord promised here in Micah 7 that His people would rise again and be restored to their land to rebuild Jerusalem and the temple of the living God (just as in Jeremiah 50:1-5). Then to the utter amazement of the nations of the world, God raised up the seemingly dead and dry bones of Israel and Judah, put flesh and sinew upon them, and united them together to form a restored and resurrected Israel that would return to the land and rebuild the city and the temple (Ezekiel 37). This was first accomplished in the reign of Cyrus as we read in Ezra 1:1-3. Just as the nations of the world were absolutely confounded at the deliverance of Israel out of Egypt (the greatest power of the world at that time), so the nations would stare in bewilderment at the deliverance of Israel out of Assyria, Babylon, and Media/Persia the greatest kingdoms of that time. The nations that had led them into captivity would each be brought from their heights of power to lick the dust of the ground in utter defeat. Even as the fear of the Lord fell upon Egypt and all the surrounding nations as they heard of God's mighty power in smashing Egypt and delivering Israel, so the fear of the Lord likewise fell upon the nations of the world as they saw Assyria and Babylon fall and Israel returned to her land to rebuild the city and the temple (Micah 7:17).

E. The language of restoration used in these verses (returning and rebuilding) not only speaks of Israel's restoration under Cyrus and succeeding kings, but even more gloriously refers to the restoration of Israel when Israel as a covenanted Christian nation shall be saved and grafted back into her own olive tree (Romans 11:24), when Israel as a covenanted Christian nation shall say with all covenanted Christian nations of the world, "Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord" (Matthew 23:39), and when the kingdom of God shall be restored to Israel as a covenanted Christian nation together with all covenanted Christian nations of the world (Acts 1:6-7). At that time, the headlines throughout the world will read in utter astonishment, "Israel Turns to Jesus Christ Whom She Once Hated and Crucified." Such a glorious restoration will spell the doom of antichrist and the ingathering of all the nations of the world to Jesus Christ. Such unspeakable events the Lord will accomplish—perhaps even in the lifetime of ourselves or our children.

F. Beloved, the promises of restoration made here to Israel as a nation are likewise made to God's remnant individually and collectively today (e.g. Jesus restores Peter individually in John 21:15-17, and the Lord will restore His Church collectively as taught in Revelation 3:20).

## **II. The Prayer of a Faithful Minister (Micah 7:14).**

A. Here we see the heart of a faithful minister as the prophet Micah pleads with the Lord on

behalf of Israel. God is likened to a shepherd and His people are likened to His sheep. A faithful minister is one who continually pleads with God in prayer that the Lord would lead His flock into the paths of righteousness and truth, that the Lord would protect and defend His flock from all enemies outside and inside the church who would seek to mislead, divide, and scatter them (whether false teachers, corrupt worship, false doctrine, comfortable and secure lives that will not stand for Christ, hypocrisy in going through the mere motions of our faith, pride, anger, bitterness, lust, love of money and the applause of man, trusting in the arm of flesh, little or no love for the needs of brethren, promoting dissension and division within the Church of Christ). A faithful minister understands that the only hope for the Church of Christ is not in himself or in his gifts or abilities, but in Christ alone. Thus, he is brought to realize his own insufficiency every day and his dependence upon the Lord alone. With heavy heart he bears the burdens of God's people (individually and collectively) to the Lord. The primary tasks of the faithful minister are summarized under these two heads: "We will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word" (Acts 6:4). The minister who is a stranger to prayer before the Lord on behalf of himself and his flock (regardless of the pure doctrine, worship, and church government he promotes), is unfaithful to his calling as a minister of Jesus Christ. Such a heart for prayer in a minister implies that a minister loves the sheep entrusted to him by Christ and seeks to know them and their needs (from the youngest to the oldest).

B. In Micah 7:14, the prophet prays that God would feed His people with His rod. The shepherd's rod primarily served two purposes: (1) to defend the sheep against enemies; and (2) to discipline the sheep when they strayed.

1. Note that the use of the rod in either defending or disciplining the flock is an aspect of feeding: "feed thy people with the rod." For in defending the sheep from their enemies and in disciplining the sheep to follow the Good Shepherd, the shepherd is promoting their feeding, their growth, and their welfare. This implies that the rod is not an instrument of vengeance and hatred, but rather an instrument of love and ought always to be used in love. How, therefore, we should learn to kiss the rod rather than to despise the rod in our lives (whether it come in the form of trials from God, or whether it come in the form of instruction or correction from parents or church officers). Those who despise the rod will not be fed, but will indeed starve and bring about their own destruction (Proverbs 15:10).

2. This also implies that one of the primary uses of the rod in the ministry of the church is directed against the various errors and heresies of the age that would attack the flock of Christ. It is not an unfaithful ministry that preaches against error whether it is embraced by the world or by the church, but to the contrary, it is one of the characteristics of a faithful ministry (and a faithful use of the rod).

C. Though the flock is scattered in solitary places, lonely places, isolated places, the faithful minister cares for them and prays for them as he does for those whom he sees each Lord's Day. The faithful minister prays that those who are scattered might be brought to feed in Bashan and Gilead as in days of old, which places were known to be rich, abundant places to graze and feed sheep. Here we are called to love, correspond with, care for, and pray for our brethren who meet for worship by themselves and cannot join with us each Lord's Day. We are called to pray that God might raise up faithful pastors, elders, and deacons to serve his sheep in places where a faithful church does not exist so that they might feed on all the ordinances of Christ. Although our load as shepherds of the sheep may become great, we cannot ignore nor neglect the sheep "which dwell solitarily in the wood." Such sacrifices to feed those in solitary places, may call for sacrifices not only for the shepherds, but also for those sheep within this congregation or other congregations which cannot have as much time devoted to them as they might like. It calls for sacrifices from all of us. It calls all of us to be willing to sacrifice ourselves for one another.

### **III. The Response of a Thankful People (Micah 7:18-20).**

A. The response of a people who have heard of the mighty deliverances God has wrought for His people in days of old from all their enemies and how He has time and time again restored His people unto Himself after they followed after other lovers and pleasures, and the response of a people who have themselves experienced deliverance after deliverance from the grips of the devil, the world, and the flesh and who have also experienced the lovingkindness of the Lord in restoring them continually unto Himself must be that of the highest praise and most sincere thanksgiving. “Who is a God like unto thee?” Of course the answer is, “There is none like unto our God.”

B. The people of God who were miraculously delivered from the pursuing Egyptians and were shown mercy after mercy sang with Moses at the banks of the Red Sea in Exodus 15:9-13. So likewise, the Prophet Micah expresses the thankfulness of God’s remnant when they declare the words we find in Micah 7:18-20.

C. One of the essential characteristics of the true Christian religion which is missing from all false religion is the characteristic of saving grace to undeserving sinners. All false religions may have some form of forgiveness offered by their gods to penitent offenders. Baal worshippers believed the wrath of Baal could be appeased with the sacrifice of their children. The Romanists believe that the angry Jesus may be appeased and forgiveness obtained if the penitent man is willing to make various sacrifices in his life to secure that forgiveness. Only biblical Christianity declares the free and full pardon of sin by an offended God through the work of our Mediator—the Lord Jesus Christ. Only biblical Christianity proclaims to all who will come and embrace Jesus Christ by faith alone, not only a full pardon, but also a perfect imputed righteousness that can never be stripped away.

D. Why does the Lord pardon iniquity, pass by our transgressions, and retain not His anger against us forever? “Because he delighteth in mercy” (Micah 7:18). Dear ones, you need never wonder whether the Lord will delight to forgive you, no matter how many times you have sinned against Him. If you come sincerely leaning upon Christ and seeking forgiveness for Christ’s sake, you will only and always find God delighting to show you mercy. You will never have to pull mercy out of Him as if He were reluctant to let it go (a tug of war with God).

E. Why does the Lord turn again and again to us when we fall one time after another? Why does He have compassion upon us even when we are overcome by our enemies (the world, the flesh, and the devil)? Why does He continue His gracious work of subduing and sanctifying us? Why does He cast all our sins into the depths of the sea? Because He will “perform the truth to Jacob, and the mercy to Abraham” which He has “sworn unto our fathers from the days of old” (Micah 7:20). The Lord will be faithful to the covenants He has made with His people. Although you who trust in the Lord may leave Christ, your first love, and seek after other lovers, and gratify the flesh, yet God the Father has made a covenant with God the Son to redeem, justify, adopt, sanctify, and glorify all those given by the Father to the Son to save. We do not sin that grace may abound, but where sin did abound grace did much more abound.

F. The forgiveness of the Lord is highlighted by Micah: “thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea” (Micah 7:19). Just as the Egyptians were cast into the depths of the sea and buried there, so the Lord buries all (not some) of our sins in the depths of His grace and mercy.

G. This being the case, why do we need to continue to seek forgiveness from the Lord throughout our Christian life? All our sins (past, present, and future) are once and for all forgiven by God as judge when we are justified by trusting in Christ alone; however, we are to continue to seek the forgiveness of God as our Father in order to enjoy communion with God. We are no longer under the condemnation of God as a Judge; however, we are under the discipline of God as a Father.

H. If we have been forgiven so much, how can we refuse to forgive those who sin against us? If we would enjoy the forgiveness of God, we must be willing to forgive others who sin against us. Not to do so is the height of hypocrisy.

In conclusion, what great principles shall we take with us from this inspired prophecy of Micah upon which to reflect.

1. Trust not in man or the resources of man, but rather trust wholly in the Lord Almighty.
2. Follow not the multitude to do evil.
3. Fret not thyself because of the success of evil doers.
4. Turn from all hypocrisy in faith or life.
5. Don't expect a comfortable life if you are walking in faithfulness to Christ.
6. Don't despise the least measure of grace bestowed upon you. Be thankful for all of the mercies of the Lord.
7. Don't fail to heed the invitation of Christ, for He delights in mercy. This is perhaps the greatest sin of all.

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