

The Millennial Glory of the Church #2

Micah 4:2-5; Isaiah 2:2-4

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What is biblical hope? Is it mere wishful thinking as when we say, “I sure hope it doesn’t rain today”? If that is all that biblical hope is then we who are Christians have nothing more than the ungodly. Even the atheist has the kind of hope that wishes upon a star. No, that is not biblical hope. Rather, biblical hope is a certain confidence and firm expectation that what God has promised in His Word He will unfailingly bring to pass (Titus 1:1-2). Biblical hope is not a “maybe”, but is rather a “must be”. Those who are without Jesus Christ are described as having “no hope” (Ephesians 2:12). And without a doubt, one of the greatest terrors and horrors of hell itself is that there are no second chances—it is not only a place of torment, but it is a place of endless torment wherein there is no hope. Remove hope from a person and there is left only despair. That is why we must ever set before our eyes hope in the Lord Jesus Christ, and in our presentation of the gospel of Christ He must always be presented as the trusting sinner’s only hope.

One of the great promises of hope upon which the prophets and people of God have feasted throughout the ages is that of the glory of Christ’s universal victory in crushing the kingdom of Satan and in exalting the kingdom of Christ by bringing the nations of this world into the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ so that the vast majority of the nations of this world will swear allegiance to Christ the Lord (Isaiah 45:22-23). This is not mere wishful thinking. This is certainly promised by the Lord through His holy prophets as in Micah 4:1-5. This Lord’s Day I will address the following main points of hope from our text: (1) The Hope of the Nations; (2) The Hope of Ecclesiastical Unity; (3) The Hope of Universal Peace.

I. The Hope of the Nations (Micah 4:2).

A. Last Lord’s day, we noted that this prophecy was to be fulfilled in what Micah calls, “the last days” (i.e. before the second coming Christ, the gospel of the Lord will be mightily blessed by God’s Spirit in bringing destruction to the kingdom of Antichrist and in ushering in an unprecedented time of gospel blessing). Micah also addresses in verse 1 how “the mountain of the Lord’s house” (which is the kingdom of Christ) shall be exalted above all earthly kingdoms in glory and importance and how the peoples or nations and the leaders of the world will flow like a mighty river into Christ’s kingdom.

1. This is Historic Postmillennialism. This is not a novel view maintained by a few radicals here and there, but rather it is the classic position of biblical hope professed by the Reformed and Presbyterian Churches of the First and Second Reformations.

2. Calvin states in his commentary on Psalm 72:

[T]he whole world will be brought in subjection to the authority of Christ.... The nations will be convinced that nothing is more desireable than to receive from him laws and ordinances....

3. That faithful martyr and covenanted minister for the Cause of Christ in Scotland, Richard Cameron, spoke these words in a sermon three days before he was struck down by the antichristian forces of Charles II (*The Puritan Hope*, pp. 54,55):

You that are in hazard for the truth, be not troubled: our Lord will be exalted among the heathen. But many will say, “We know He will be exalted at the last and great day when He shall have all wicked on His left hand.” Yes; but says He, “I will be exalted in the earth.” He has been exalted on the earth; but the most wonderfully exalting of His works we have not yet seen. The people of God have been right high already. Oh, but the Church of the Jews [of the

Old Testament—GLP] was sometimes very high, and sometimes the Christian Church [of the New Testament—GLP]! In the time of Constantine she was high. Yea, the Church of Scotland has been very high, “Fair as the moon, clear as the sun; and terrible as an army with banners.” The day has been when Zion was stately in Scotland. The terror of the Church of Scotland once took hold of all the kings and great men that passed by. Yea; the terror of it took hold on Popish princes; nay, on the Pope himself. But all this exalting that we have yet seen is nothing to what is to come. The Church was high, but it shall be yet much higher. “There is none like the God of Jeshurun.” The Church of Christ is to be so exalted that its members shall be made to ride upon the high places of the earth. Let us not be judged to be of the opinion of some men in England called the Fifth-Monarchy men, who say that, before the great day, Christ shall come in person from heaven with all the saints and martyrs and reign a thousand years on earth [which is the premillennial position—GLP]. But we are of the opinion that the Church shall yet be more high and glorious, as appears from the book of Revelation, and the Church shall have more power than ever she had before.

4. The Lord has given such great promises in order that we His people may not despair, though the world presently love not our Christ, and though the world presently hate us His disciples. For our efforts are not in vain in the Lord. Christ, our victorious King, will yet cause His gospel (which is the power of God unto salvation) to humble the hearts of the nations; and dear ones, we are a part of that great work which is likely to begin with our lifetime or within the lifetime of our children. Let us consider then our first main point.

B. Micah says, “And many nations shall come” with the emphasis upon “many.” This prophecy speaks not of just a few nations here and there, but many of them throughout the whole world. This is the clear testimony of God’s Word (Isaiah 2:2; Psalm 22:27 [note that this is not fulfilled in the eternal state]; Psalm 72:11 [note that this not fulfilled in the eternal state]).

1. I would particularly draw your attention to Paul’s prophecy (in Romans 11) concerning the ingathering of the nations in the last days.

2. In Romans chapter 11 the Apostle Paul addresses the matter of Israel’s blindness and how long she will continue in that judicial blindness administered by the Lord upon her for her apostasy.

3. Is God finished with Israel as a people? God forbid (Romans 11:1,28,29).

4. How can we know? There is a present remnant according to God gracious election (Romans 11:5).

5. For what purpose has God decreed the fall of Israel as a people? So as to bring salvation to the Gentiles and to provoke Israel to jealousy (Romans 11:11).

6. What effect will the nations have upon Israel and Israel have upon the nations? The fullness of the Gentiles will bring the fullness of Israel, and the fullness of Israel will bring a great fullness of the Gentiles (Romans 11:12,25,26). Herein the Apostle Paul describes for us what Micah had prophesied some 800 years before in our text: “And many nations shall come.” That this was the millennial hope of our Reformed and Presbyterian forefathers as well, I would have you note the following references.

7. *The Larger Catechism* (produced by the Westminster Assembly) asks in Question 191:

Question 191: What do we pray for in the second petition [of the Lord’s Prayer—GLP]?

Answer: In the second petition... we pray, that the kingdom of sin and Satan may be destroyed, the gospel propagated throughout the world, the Jews called, the fulness of the Gentiles brought in; the church furnished with all gospel officers and ordinances, purged from corruption, countenanced and maintained by the civil magistrate....

8. Furthermore, *The Directory for the Public Worship of God* (also issued by the Westminster Assembly) gives direction as to what faithful ministers are to pray for in their public prayers:

To pray for the propagation of the gospel and kingdom of Christ to all nations; for the conversion of the Jews, the fulness of the Gentiles, the fall of Antichrist, and the hastening of the second coming of our Lord.

9. Listen as well to the great hope of that shining light of the Second Reformation, Samuel Rutherford, as he bursts forth in great joy (Rutherford's *Letters*, pp. 122,123):

O to see the sight, next to Christ's Coming in the clouds, the most joyful! Our elder brethren the Jews and Christ fall upon one another's necks and kiss each other! They have been long asunder; they will be kind to one another when they meet. O day! O longed-for and lovely day-dawn! O sweet Jesus, let me see that sight which will be as life from the dead, thee and thy ancient people in mutual embraces.

10. Finally, this hope was not simply that of the British Presbyterians, but was the shared hope of those great teachers in the Reformed Churches of Holland as well as we see in the following citation from Herman Witsius, in his classic work, *The Economy of the Covenants Between God and Man* (Bk. 4, Ch. 15, Sec. 21,35):

That when the fulness of the Gentiles is brought in, all Israel shall be saved: that is, as our Dutch commentators well observe, not a few, but a very great number, and in a manner the whole Jewish nation in a full body.... And not only so, but also many nations, among whom the name of Christ had long been before forgotten, shall be seen to flock again to the standard of salvation then erected.

C. Furthermore, carefully note that Micah says, "And many nations shall come" with the emphasis now upon "nations." Not a minority from a few nations, but nations in their national capacity (i.e. not only the citizens of many nations, but also the civil leaders who rule those nations), e.g. Micah 4:3; Psalm 72:10-11; Isaiah 49:22-23. This ingathering of the nations is simply the fulfillment of the promise made by the Father to Christ from all eternity in the Covenant of Redemption in Psalm 2:8: "Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen [literally, the nations—GLP] for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession." No wonder Paul in Romans 11:15 considers this time of millennial blessing to be like a life from the dead (a worldwide spiritual awakening, and dear ones, we are most likely not far from the time—yes, we must face some time of suffering first, but, oh, the glory and beauty of Christ's kingdom that awaits us and our children).

II. The Hope of Ecclesiastical Unity (Micah 4:2).

A. Here we note that in the period of the church's millennial blessing many nations from the world will come into the "mountain of the LORD, and to the house of the God of Jacob" (which as we noted last Lord's Day is a figurative expression for Christ's Church).

B. This wondrous prophecy not only speaks of individual Christians calling each other to come into Christ's Church and to be taught of Christ and walk in His ways, but this is specifically stated of "many nations" compelling one another to be joined together in covenantal unity. If one nation calls another nation to come with it to Christ's kingdom, how can that be accomplished unless they are covenanted together in one doctrine, worship, and government ("Can two walk together, except they be agreed? Amos 3:3). Then will Christ's prayer be answered which He prayed while on earth (John 17:21). Then will Israel and the nations

together swear national covenants in the name of the Lord (Jeremiah 4:2). Then will ecclesiastical unity and uniformity reign through the world as prophesied in Zechariah 14:9. His name is that by which He makes Himself known, which includes His ordinances of doctrine, worship, and government, cf. *Shorter Catechism* 55:

Q55: What is forbidden in the Third Commandment [which is "thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain: for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh His name in vain"—GLP]?

A55: The Third Commandment forbiddeth all profaning or abusing anything whereby God maketh Himself known.

C. This is why we steadfastly adhere to faithful national and ecclesiastical covenants sworn on our behalf by our forefathers (like *The Solemn League and Covenant*). Such covenanted uniformity between nations is promised in Micah 4:2.

D. It is promised to the nations who flow into the Visible Church at that time: “and he [i.e. Christ—GLP] will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for the law shall go forth of Zion, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.” The nations at that time will not teach what they want about Christ and His doctrine, nor will they worship the Lord according to their own dictates, but they will be taught by what is authorized by Christ alone in His Word. As Calvin notes in his commentary on this text:

[T]rue religion is founded on the obedience of faith, and that God cannot be worshipped, except when he himself teaches his people, and prescribes to them what is necessary to be done. Hence when the will of God is revealed to us, we then can truly worship him. When the word is again taken away, there will indeed be some form of divine worship; but there will be no genuine religion, such as is pleasing to God.... Since it is so, it follows, that where the truth is either corrupted or despised, there is no religion, at least such as is approved by God. Men may indeed boast of the name with their lips: but there is no true religion before God, except it be formed according to the rule of his word.

III. The Hope of Universal Peace (Micah 4:3-4).

A. Here we note that the gospel (where it is genuinely received and practiced) always has visible effects in the lives of individuals (in their families and in their vocations), in the life of the church, or in the life of a nation or nations. The effect of the gospel cannot be hidden under a bushel. The work of the gospel cannot help but change even a nation that has submitted itself to Christ. Again, we see the fallacy of the amillennial position that would emphasize the inward work of the gospel, but exclude the outward work which is emphasized in this passage. These are not simply a few individual people who beat their swords into pruning hooks, but entire nations, and not simply one or two nations, but many nations. What a glorious prospect: universal peace due not to the meritorious works of men, but due to the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ, which alone can make enemies into brothers and sisters in Christ. If this is the blessing for which we wait and pray, how should we then be living now? Love the brethren.

B. In light of this prophecy, Micah concludes with this word in Micah 4:5: “For all people will walk every one in the name of his god, and we will walk in the name of the LORD our God for ever and ever.” The Lord calls us to faithfulness in promoting this great blessing of the future. Remember it is not our cause, it is the cause of Christ. It will not be wrought by man’s strength, man’s weapons, man’s knowledge, but by the Spirit of God taking men, women, and children who have been wrought upon by the gospel of Christ.

C. I conclude by pointing out that in looking forward to this time of millennial blessing, we neither

minimize the need for our present suffering for Christ, nor do we minimize the blessed hope of Christ's Second Coming. We must count it all joy to suffer for Christ's name, for Christ's cause, for Christ's covenants; and we must never ever forget that the time of prophesied millennial blessing is simply a foretaste of the heavenly blessings which we will enjoy for all eternity. Beloved, we know we belong to Christ because we love Him and His appearing: "Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing" 2 Timothy 4:8.

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