

From Judgment to Brokenness

Micah 1:8-16; 1 Peter 4:17

April 5, 1998

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When ominous signs of God's judgment appear in the world, how should we respond? With indifference and apathy? "I really don't have time to think about God's judgment, I'm just too busy." With excess and pleasure? "If God's judgment is going to fall, I want to make sure I get in all the good times I possibly can." With anger and bitterness? "It is not fair for God to bring His judgment upon us." With doubt and unbelief? "I just don't believe that God judges nations and people today as He did in the days of Scripture." With pride and arrogance? "Heathen nations may certainly feel the sting of God's judgment, but there are too many Christians in my country for God to judge this nation."

One thing for sure, none of the foregoing responses to the threat of God's judgment manifests the gracious and efficacious work of the Holy Spirit in the life of a Christian. The responses that evidence the gracious work of God's Spirit when God threatens judgment are rather a deep humility before God, a sobering fear of the Most High God, an earnest sorrow and grief over sin, a fervent pleading for God's mercy, a renewed love for Christ and communion with Christ, a sincere thankfulness to the Lord for His innumerable benefits, a profound reverence for God's holiness, and a renewed zeal to walk faithfully in the paths of revealed truth and righteousness.

Last Lord's Day, we observed that God as a faithful husband convened the court and brought a covenant lawsuit against His unfaithful bride—Israel and Judah—for her adultery in backsliding from the pure ordinances of worship which He had authorized (read 1:5,6a,7a). This Lord's Day, we shall witness the great mourning that should accompany the Lord's impending judgment for man's idolatry (which as we noted is the chief sin that leads to all other sins). I have three main points from the text that is before us today: (1) The Grieving of God's Prophet (Micah 1:8-9); (2) The Mercy of God's Judgment (Micah 1:10-15); (3) The Response to God's Judgment (Micah 1:16).

I. The Grieving of God's Prophet (Micah 1:8-9).

A. Having delivered the formal law-suit against the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah for their corporate backsliding (1:2-7), Micah's heart is overcome by sorrow and grief.

1. In our English text, verse 8 begins with "Therefore." Micah explains that in light of God's judgment that is soon to fall upon Israel and Judah, "Therefore I will wail and howl, I will go stripped and naked." In other words, what immediately precedes verse 8 is the reason for the prophet's grief.

2. The sorrow that overcomes the prophet of the Lord is not a casual case of mere regret as if to say, "Oh, it's really too bad that Israel and Judah have to endure God's judgment. I can't let it bother me, because I've got more important things to do."

3. It is doubtful that more intense words could have been used to express the anguish of Micah's sorrow. "Wailing" does not convey that just a tear or two is shed, but rather expresses the weeping and heart-wrenching grief that a parent has at the death of an only child (Zechariah 12:10). Furthermore, the prophet's sorrow is not confined to tears and sobbing for Israel and Judah, but issues in even a loud "howling" like that of the "dragons" (or more accurately jackals or wolves at night) and like that of "owls" which sound at night. Moreover, Micah portrays not only his own sorrow, but also pictures the sorrow that will be realized in the lives of God's people when they are led forth into Assyrian and Babylonian captivity "stripped and naked."

4. *The Annotations of the Westminster Assembly* write concerning these words of the prophet,

Stript and naked, namely, in my shirt, or without my outward garment, which was a fashion used in times of extreme sorrow.

a. The Lord's people in the First and Second Reformations were mightily led by the Lord out of a spiritual captivity in Rome into the glorious freedom of Christ's truth and righteousness, but have since been gradually and to varying degrees subtly blinded and led back into the perverse doctrine and corrupt worship of Rome (Arminianism is man-made salvation, idolatry is man-made worship). Indeed the words of Psalm 137:1 ring as true today as they ever did in the Babylonian captivity of the Jews ("By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion"). Dear ones, you who enjoy the ordinances of God faithfully administered each week, do you weep and mourn for those who must meet by themselves because they have no faithful church in which to worship? Do you cry out to God that He would raise up ministers for His scattered remnant? Is your heart broken over the thousands of divisions in the body of Christ? Have you stopped to consider the judgment of God the church is presently under (1 Peter 4:17; Revelation 2:4-5; 2:15-16; 2:20-23; 3:15-19)? We should live in humble prayer for brethren and churches that have fallen into sin and error earnestly seeking God for their repentance and restoration rather than rejoicing in their fall (1 John 5:16; Psalm 35:11-14).

b. And if such sorrow is the duty of every Christian, how much more the duty of every minister of Jesus Christ. Micah led the way as an example for the Visible Church of Israel and Judah, and ministers today must again see themselves more like prophets than entertainers. Ministers must have an eye to the Word of God and an eye to the providence of God in history. Ministers must declare to their people the sins and errors of the times in order that the people might avail themselves of the unfathomable mercy of Christ. Ministers are watchmen upon the walls of Jerusalem, and we will be judged by how faithfully we have warned the church of impending danger in the form of error, false worship, and unrighteousness. How then can such a serious calling bring forth such levity and lightness in the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ?

c. An English minister (Richard Baxter, *The Reformed Pastor*, pp.119,120) wrote in 1656,

Of all preaching in the world . . . I hate that preaching which tends to make the hearers laugh, or to move their minds with tickling levity, and affect them as stage-plays used to do, instead of affecting them with a holy reverence of the name of God. Jerome says, "Teach in thy church, not to get the applause of the people, but to set in motion the groan; the tears of the hearers are thy praises."

d. Dear ones, without the deep groan for our own and other's idolatry, without the painful sorrow for the threatened judgment of God upon the church and upon the nation, without sincere repentance, without crying out to Jesus Christ like blind Bartimaeus (Mark 10:48: "And many charged him that he should hold his peace: but he cried the more a great deal, Thou Son of David, have mercy on me"), there will be no mercy.

B. Before moving on to the next main point, note the reason for Micah's grief in 1:9.

1. Israel's and Judah's wound is not incurable because God cannot forgive or because God will not show mercy. They are indeed guilty of gross infidelity and apostasy from their God, but they have not committed the unpardonable sin. Why then is their wound incurable? Because they will not confess they are sick and in need of a physician (Jeremiah 8:22-9:3; Mark 2:15-17).

2. Dear ones, flee the delusion of the enemy in believing that any sin you commit is either too small to bother with or too great to be forgiven. It is those seeming small sins of omission that lead to the public sins of commission. It is omitting the duty of daily communion with Christ in the Word and prayer that eventually leads to fear, worry, lust, and discontentment. One degree of unfaithfulness left unchecked grows

into a greater degree of unfaithfulness. Those who are mighty and faithful in word and deed are without a doubt mighty and faithful in secret communion with Christ. But neither should you go to the opposite extreme in believing that your sins are so great that the Lord Jesus Christ cannot heal them (as if His grace was not sufficient). Paul holds himself out as the chief of sinners, and God had mercy upon him. David was a man after God's own heart, not because he was sinless, nor because he never fell into some grave public scandal, but because he believed and hoped in the promised mercy of God ("But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound" Romans 5:20). The invitation of Christ found in Revelation 3:20 is forever addressed to the unconverted and converted alike—to the most profane fornicator, to the most self-righteous hypocrite, and to the most weak, faltering Christian who will flee to Christ. Hear His invitation to you today, come to Him with all your heart and He will receive you (He is the Man of sorrows and one acquainted with grief due to our sin).

II. The Mercy of God's Judgment (Micah 1:10-15).

A. Perhaps it may sound strange to you to speak of the mercy of God's judgment, but that is what we see throughout the prophetic writings. "The LORD is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works" (Psalm 145:17). Therefore, His fearful judgments upon men in this life (and that which is to come) manifest the glory of God's unbending righteousness. However, the Lord does not take delight in arbitrarily pouring out His judgment upon man ("Say unto them, As I live, saith the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?" Ezekiel 33:11). Dear ones, Calvinism and biblical Christianity do not teach that God is some maniacal fiend in heaven who takes great delight in the arbitrary suffering and judgment of man. To the contrary, Calvinism and biblical Christianity teach that the infinitely holy God delights in showing mercy to all who turn in faith to Christ (Micah 7:18-19; Lamentations 3:32-33). Thus, we ought always to be looking for not only God's holiness and righteousness in His judgment, but also God's mercy in His judgment (Psalm 86:16-18; Psalm 119:71,75).

B. In Micah 1:10-15, we especially see the mercy of God displayed in His judgment in that He first announces by His prophet that judgment is about to fall upon them. If God took pleasure in the death of the wicked, He would most likely send the most severe degree of judgment and suffering upon the world immediately and without any warning. Yet such a view of God is completely adverse to the hundreds of examples of God's merciful dealings with men (Genesis 6:3). In fact, the Lord did not pour forth His judgment without first revealing the matter to His prophets (Amos 3:7). That is no reason to presume upon the mercy of God, as if we deserved it or as if it might always be available to us, for the Apostle Paul rebukes all such arrogant presumption on the part of man (Romans 2:2-4).

C. Micah mentions 10 different cities, towns, and villages in Micah 1:10-15. The prophet speaks of the judgment that would come to Israel and Judah from the Assyrians and the Babylonians. He even holds out special mercy to Jerusalem in this invasion by the Assyrians, for although the Assyrians will desolate the rest of Judah, yet God graciously promises that God's judgment will only reach the gate of the city of Jerusalem (Micah 1:12—"evil came down from the LORD" refers not to moral evil but to evil as calamity, destruction, and desolation sent by the Lord of Hosts). Why? Because Hezekiah humbled himself before the Lord and pleaded for the mercy of God. Could not any of these other cities mentioned in Micah 1:10-15 have enjoyed the same mercy of God had they heeded the threatened judgment and turned to the Lord?

III. The Response to God's Judgment (Micah 1:16).

A. In light of the threatened judgment of God, the prophet pleads with the people to mourn, grieve, and sorrow and give tangible evidence of it (shave the head in that culture, but perhaps for us this sorrow would be manifested by fasting and prayer, by taking life more seriously, by spending less time

watching TV and more time in the presence of Christ, more time catechizing our children, more time talking with our spouses, more time showing love, affection, and mercy to our brethren).

B. In conclusion what are we to learn when signs of God's judgment are all around us? The prophet Isaiah tells us what we are to learn (Isaiah 26:9): "When thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness." Calvin (*Commentaries*, 7:221,222) explains,

. . . by chastisements men are taught to fear God. In prosperity they forget him, and their eyes are as it were blinded by fatness . . . because if God do not, with uplifted arm, claim his right to rule, no man of his own accord yields obedience.

Dear ones, God's judgments are indeed in the world when you read of the impending collapse of the Japanese economy, when you hear of the Supreme Court of a covenanted nation ruling that sodomy is a protected civil right, when you hear of possible calamities that could fall upon the whole world due to computers not being able to interpret dated information after the year 2,000, or when you see so many professing Protestant and Reformed churches buying idols from the Romish harlot in the form of man-made doctrine and man-made worship. At such a time as this, it is not time to fall asleep spiritually. It is not time to party. It is not time to pat ourselves proudly on the back for a job well done. Rather, it is time for serious reflection. It is time for thoughtful meditation. It is time for humble soul-searching. It is time for sorrowful chest-beating for our own sin and the sin of others. And it is time for speedy flight to the mercy-seat of Jesus Christ—for the Day of the Lord's swift judgment draws near.

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