

## VI. *Mighty Messiah*

08-Jan-06            Micah 5:2-15

*Theme:*            The ministry of the Church is to preach the whole gospel of Christ: sin and rebellion against God leads to eternal judgment, but repentance and faith in Jesus leads to salvation and eternal life.

*Key Verses:*    Micah 5:2 <sup>2</sup>But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times.

### Review

Last week, we looked at Micah 4:1-5:1. This passage, which describes God's *global glory*, is a series of five time-oriented oracles that move progressively backwards in time, from eternity to the church age to the restoration to the captivity to victory over Sennacherib to the siege of Sennacherib. By arranging his oracles in this reverse fashion, Micah is teaching us that the promises of eternity are much more powerful than the problems of the present.

The first five verses of Micah 4 describe the *heavenly harmony* that begins in the Church Age but is consummated in eternity. Micah first describes the *worldwide worship* of the Church. The Church is to be characterized as glorious, global, teachable, obedient, and evangelical. Micah then describes the *perfect peace* that Christ gives us, by dispensing true justice and righteousness, and providing prosperity and security throughout eternity. Truly this is a glorious picture of our future rest, and it is assured because "the mouth of the Lord has spoken" it.

The second half of Micah 4 (including 5:1) is a series of four shorter oracles that demonstrate God's sovereignty over the nations through His *international intervention* in the affairs of men. In 4:6-8, God's *forever flock* is transformed from a lame, afflicted outcast into a stronghold, a dominion, a kingdom of strength under the protection of Jesus as both Shepherd and King. In 4:9-10, Micah predicts *coming captivity* in Babylon, but he also extends the hope of restoration and redemption to the remnant of God's people. In 4:11-13, God's *threshing thoughts* are not known by His enemies; victory is assured because it is God who is sovereign over the nations of men. Finally, in 5:1, *Sennacherib's siege* looms over God's people, threatening humiliation and suffering. It is clear that King Hezekiah is unable to protect the people of God. A greater king is needed. Where will He come from? Who would He be?

### Introduction

Those questions lead us right into today's lesson, Micah 5:2-15. The passage of Scripture in front of us is a bit like a teeter-totter. In the first section, Micah answers the questions about a greater king by describing the *righteous ruler* that will come to save God's people (vv. 2-5a). In this description of the *mighty Messiah*, Jesus Christ, we find many echoes of the previous chapter of Micah. Jesus Christ is the **Ruler** who is the better king and judge. Jesus Christ comes forth from the pain and travail of **labor** and **childbirth**. Jesus Christ is the Shepherd who feeds the **flock** of the **remnant**. Jesus Christ is the global answer, who reigns over all the nations **to the ends of the earth**. Jesus Christ not only establishes **peace**, He **shall be peace**. And finally, Jesus Christ ensures all of these promises forever and ever because He is eternal, He is **from everlasting**.

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At the other end of our seesaw is a section I've entitled *pagan purge* (vv. 10-15). In this passage, Micah describes many of the "other gods" we rely on in place of God's *mighty Messiah*. Whether it is military strength, occultist practices, or idolatry, all of these are attempts to replace the Creator's place in our lives with something He has created. Do we trust in Jesus Christ alone, or in our own strength? Do we look to the Spirit for truth, or do we search in all the wrong places? Do we fill our hearts with the worship of the Father, or do we replace him with things that ultimately cannot satisfy? Sadly, Christians too often do these very things. Thus Micah describes the purge of these pagan things from the Church, before announcing punishment on those outside the church.

Finally, the fulcrum or balance point of our teeter-totter is in the middle section (vv. 5b-9), *remnant redemption*. This section assures the Church of victory even as it describes its two-fold ministry. On the one hand, we are to be a sweet savor that draws the nations to Christ, the *righteous ruler*. On the other hand, we are to be God's force which denounces sin and wickedness, leading the *pagan purge*.

Ultimately, there are only two destinies that await all of mankind. These are the two ends of the seesaw. Every individual will either **abide** in the **strength of the LORD** (v. 4), or they will suffer the **vengeance, anger, and fury** of God and be **cut off** from Him forever (vv. 10-15).

### Exposition

#### A. Righteous Ruler (5:2-5a)

First, let us turn our attention to Micah's description of the *righteous ruler*. The context for this passage (vv. 2-5a) is rooted deeply in chapter 4. As Waltke writes, this oracle "moves from the present distress to future salvation, more particularly from the humiliation of Jerusalem's king (v. 1) to the Messiah's victory (vv. 2-5)."

This section of Micah is one of only two passages in Micah that is quoted in the New Testament. When the wise men of the east sought the birthplace of the Savior, Herod's advisers knew the answer. The quotation in Matthew 2:6 is a conflation of Micah chapter 5 verses 2&4:

<sup>3</sup>When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. <sup>4</sup>And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. <sup>5</sup>So they said to him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it is written by the prophet: <sup>6</sup>*'But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are not the least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you shall come a Ruler who will shepherd My people Israel'*" (Mt. 2:3-6).

John 7:42 also alludes to Micah chapter 5:

<sup>42</sup>Has not the Scripture said that the Christ comes from the seed of David and *from the town of Bethlehem*, where David was? (John 7:42).

From these New Testament passages, it is clear that the people of Jesus' day were expecting the Christ, the Messiah, the Savior to come from David's line and David's town, according to Micah chapter 5. Thus, there is no question that this passage is describing the Lord Jesus Christ, who would be born in Bethlehem 700 years after these words were first written.

## Minor Prophets: Micah & Haggai

### 1. Bethlehem Baby (5:2-3a)

Roy Oswalt of the Houston Astros has emerged as one of the best and most reliable starting pitchers in Major League Baseball. He was the MVP of the 2005 National League Championship Series. He has proven he can win the big game in the big city. It will be hard for him to avoid the national spotlight in the 2006 baseball season. Where did such a talent come from? Although you might expect him to be from a well-known place that produces lots of major leaguers, you would be wrong. Roy comes from tiny Weir, Mississippi – population 500. It's not on a main road. It is not on most maps. It's between French Camp and McCool, if that helps. In fact, it may be the last place on earth you would look for a Major League pitcher.

The insignificance of Weir, MS may help you understand the background of Micah 5:2. Where should God's people look for their salvation? Where was the Ruler who could deliver them going to come from? The answer must have surprised Micah, as well as his listeners. It was going to be **Bethlehem!** Bethlehem was a small village southwest of Jerusalem. It had already had its 15 minutes of fame. Bethlehem's claim to fame was that it was the hometown of the great King David. Surely lightning would not strike in the same spot twice!

And yet, Micah assures us that it will come to pass. Why should we be surprised? God's *modus operandi* is often to take the small and despised things of this world and exalt them above the high and mighty. God gives us a hint of tiny Bethlehem's importance in the meaning of the names given it. "Bethlehem" literally means in Hebrew "house of bread." It is located in the district of Judah called **Ephrathah**, which means "fruitful. It is from the same word as Ephraim, the name given by Joseph to his second son, meaning "twice fruitful" (*cp.* Gen. 41:52). Although Bethlehem Ephrathah was small, it was exceedingly fruitful, bringing forth both great David (*cp.* 1 Sam. 17:12), and great David's greater Son, Jesus Christ.

As you read the description, it almost sounds like an apology: even **though you are little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of you ...** (v. 2b). The word translated "little" here describes quality, not quantity (Waltke). In other places it is translated "weak" and "despised" (*cp.* Jdg. 6:15; Ps. 119:141). Prior points out how insignificant Bethlehem was:

It was not even mentioned in a list of place-names in Judah when Joshua divided the land (Jos. 15:20-63). When we realize that 115 towns and cities were named, 'with their villages', which remained without a name, it becomes plain just how insignificant Bethlehem was. Micah's reference to Bethlehem as the birthplace of Israel's new ruler is, therefore, a powerful pointer to the way God raises up the weak and the despised.

This forthcoming king will be unique. God says that out of Bethlehem **shall come forth to Me the One to be the Ruler in Israel** (v. 2b). Notice that He is the **One**. There will be no further need for kings once this **Ruler** has come forth. All of history had been waiting for His coming, ever since the first promise a Deliverer in Scripture (Gen. 3:15).

Even though this *Bethlehem baby* would have humble earthly origins, Micah gives us the complete picture by stressing His eternal nature. His **goings forth are from of old, from everlasting** (v. 2c). There is only one being whom this describes: God. The *mighty Messiah* would be God in human form.

<sup>12</sup>*Are You not from everlasting, O LORD my God, my Holy One? We shall not die. O LORD, You have appointed them for judgment; O Rock, You have marked them for correction (Hab. 1:12).*

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The Davidic covenant forms a strong background against Micah's prophecy. God had promised to David that would establish the kingdom of his descendant (singular, not plural) forever:

<sup>12</sup>When your days are fulfilled and you rest with your fathers, *I will set up your seed after you*, who will come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. <sup>13</sup>He shall build a house for My name, *and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever*. ... <sup>16</sup>And your house and your kingdom shall be established forever before you. Your throne shall be established forever (2 Sam. 7:12-13, 16).

Micah's prophecy here is building on the foundation of the Davidic covenant. Jesus Christ is the seed of woman (*cp.* Gen. 3:15) and the seed of David (2 Sam. 7:12) whose kingdom is established forever. He is the *righteous Ruler* of God's people.

"Great news, Micah!" the people of Jerusalem might have said after hearing this news. Looking out over the city walls at the army of the Assyrians, their next question would undoubtedly have been, "Where is He? Is He here in the city now? We could really use Him to solve this Sennacherib situation!"

So Micah moves from the *where* in verse 2 to the *when* in verse 3a: **Therefore He shall give them up, until the time that she who is in labor has given birth.** Micah is telling his fellow citizens that they will have to keep waiting for this *righteous Ruler* to arrive. God will **give them up** for a time. While the meaning of this phrase is not clear, it seems to refer to the gap between the last Davidic king and the coming of the *mighty Messiah*. It would be seven hundred years from Micah's time, almost six hundred years from the fall of Jerusalem, before this final King would be born.

Eventually, that time would come, characterized as when **she who is in labor has given birth.** In this phrase, Micah might be referring to the prophecy of his colleague, Isaiah, who had already predicted the virgin birth during the days of King Ahaz, about 30 years previously:

<sup>14</sup>Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel (Is. 7:14).

However, in context Micah is probably referring back to the imagery of the **daughter of Zion** suffering **like a woman in labor ... like a woman in birth pangs** (4:9-10). In this case, Micah is saying that the sufferings and trials of God's people will continue until the time comes for the Messiah to be born. There is a sense of completeness to this timing. Just as the gestation period of a child is known to be nine months, God knows the exact timing of the birth of the Messiah. He will not come too soon or too late, but at just the right time, even as Paul describes:

<sup>4</sup>But *when the fullness of the time had come*, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, <sup>5</sup>to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons (Gal. 4:4-5).

God's people would continue to have trials. This was not news to them. Micah had already assured them of victory of Assyria (4:11-13), but he had also warned them about the captivity in Babylon to come (4:9-10). However, they were always to know that even in the midst of suffering, there was hope of a Deliverer to come, at just the right time.

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### 2. *Strong Shepherd (5:3b-5a)*

So far, we have looked at *who* the *righteous ruler* would be. The Messiah would be born in Bethlehem, fulfill the Davidic covenant, and be God Himself in human form. He would appear in due time, at the time that God chose to bring Him into the world.

Next, Micah turns his attention to *what* the Savior will do. First, He will *gather* His people together: **Then the remnant of His brethren shall return to the children of Israel** (v. 3b). Regardless of where His people are scattered, He will bring them to Himself. Christ did this on Pentecost, when three thousand souls from the nations were saved (*cp.* Acts 2:41). Christ did this in the days following Pentecost, adding “to the church daily those who were being saved” (Acts 2:47). And Christ is still doing that today, restoring the remnant to Himself.

But Christ does not merely gather up His people like a stamp collector might collect stamps or a butterfly collector might collect butterflies. He does not put us in an album, or on a shelf, or in a display case to gather dust. No! In the second place, Christ **shall stand and feed His flock** (v. 4a). King Jesus is active in the care of His people. He is not a dictator to be feared; rather, He is a compassionate and tender Shepherd who protects His Church. This picture of Jesus Christ, restoring the remnant of His people and taking care of them by shepherding the flock is not new in Micah; it is exactly the same image that Micah has already used in 4:6-8.

Thirds, we can be assured of His protection, because He stands **in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD His God; and they shall abide** (v. 4b). We do not abide because of our own strength; rather, we rest in the strength of the Lord God. Jesus says the same thing when speaking of Himself as the Good Shepherd in the gospel of John:

<sup>27</sup>My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. <sup>28</sup>And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. <sup>29</sup>My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father’s hand. <sup>30</sup>I and My Father are one (John 10:27-30).

Once we are in the hand of the *strong Shepherd*, we can never fall out or be snatched away. We shall abide with Christ forever, because He stands in the strength of the Lord and in the majesty of His name. After all, Christ and the Father “are one.”

Fourth, Christ’s kingdom shall extend from Jerusalem **to the ends of the earth** (v. 4c). His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and it is also an all-encompassing kingdom. The great news of the gospel is that salvation is offered to all sorts of people. Listen to the song of the redeemed in heaven:

<sup>9</sup>And they sang a new song, saying: “You are worthy to take the scroll, and to open its seals; for You were slain, and *have redeemed us to God by Your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation*, <sup>10</sup>and have made us kings and priests to our God; and we shall reign on the earth” (Rev. 5:9-10).

Doesn’t this image of the nations being added to the people of God sound familiar? Micah has already presented it to us in 4:1-2, where the nations stream into the house of God to worship. It is the Messiah, Jesus Christ, who makes *worldwide worship* happen.

Finally, Micah sums up the work of the *mighty Messiah* in one word: **peace**. Through the work of Christ, true peace, the permanent cessation of hostilities between God and man, can be achieved. Once again, we have already seen this picture of *perfect peace* in Micah chapter 4,

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verses 3-4. The peace of God's kingdom comes from Jesus Christ. This is the same message that Micah's colleague, Isaiah brings:

<sup>6</sup>For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, *Prince of Peace* (Is. 9:6).

Jesus Christ is the "Prince of Peace." But He is even more than that. Christ does not simply bring us peace or make peace between God and man (although He does do that); rather, Micah says that Jesus Christ Himself *is* peace. The apostle Paul picks up on this thought:

<sup>13</sup>But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. <sup>14</sup>*For He Himself is our peace*, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, <sup>15</sup>having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus *making peace*, <sup>16</sup>and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity. <sup>17</sup>*And He came and preached peace* to you who were afar off and to those who were near (Eph. 2:13-17).

Do you see what Paul is saying? 1) Christ *makes peace* between man and God by reconciling us to Himself through His death and resurrection; 2) Christ *preaches peace*, drawing those who are far off to Himself; and, most importantly 3) Christ *is our peace* – Christ is the reason that we have assurance of forgiveness of sins and right standing with God. As long as Christ stands (and that will be forever), peace is assured. All of the blessings of the *heavenly harmony* of Micah chapter 4 are fulfilled in Christ. **This One shall be peace.**

### B. Remnant Redemption (5:5b-9)

#### 1. Assyrian Assurance (5:5b-6)

After taking his listeners to the heights, Micah once again brings them back to reality. The Assyrians are in the land and they must be dealt with. Micah encourages his fellow countrymen not to submit to the pagan oppression of Assyria, but to stand up against it. He gives them *assurance* against *Assyria*, and by extension all the enemies of God's people.

In order to do so, God promises to raise up godly leaders: **seven shepherds and eight princely men** (v. 5b). Seven is the number of moral perfection or completion. By using the formula "seven ... and eight," Micah seems to be saying that God will more than satisfy their need for leadership. These leaders are chips off the old Messiah block. They are "shepherds" in the mold of the *strong Shepherd* of Israel. They are "princes" under the vassalage of the *righteous ruler* and King.

God raised up such a leader for Judah at this time in Hezekiah. The Scripture reserves high praise for this descendant of David and ancestor of Christ:

<sup>5</sup>He [Hezekiah] trusted in the LORD God of Israel, so that after him was none like him among all the kings of Judah, nor who were before him. <sup>6</sup>For he held fast to the LORD; he did not depart from following Him, but kept His commandments, which the LORD had commanded Moses (2 Kgs. 18:5-6).

Let us prayer for godly leaders, for men like Hezekiah who "hold fast" to the Lord and keep His commandments.

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Although God can and will raise up godly leaders, notice that the promised victory is not due to them but to the Lord: **they shall waste with the sword the land of Assyria, and the land of Nimrod at its entrances; thus He shall deliver us from the Assyrian, when he comes into our land and when he treads within our borders** (v. 6). Yes, it is true that the leaders have an impact – “they shall waste with the sword the land of Assyria.” But notice who is credited with the victory: “thus He shall deliver us from the Assyrian.” Remember, the shepherds and princes of Israel, the elders and pastors and leaders of the Church, are nothing more than servants used by God to further His kingdom.

### 2. *Remnant Role (5:7-9)*

Having assured the *remnant of redemption* from the hands of Assyria, Micah goes on to describe the *role* of the *remnant*. The true people of God, **the remnant of Jacob**, the Church, are to **be in the midst of many peoples (among the Gentiles)** (v. 7a, 8a). The Church is to be “in the world, but not of the world” (*cp.* Jn. 17:11, 16). The reason is that the Church has a ministry among the unconverted. There are two sides to that ministry, and Micah describes them in the parallel verses 7&8. On the one hand, the Church is to be **like dew from the LORD, like showers on the grass** (v. 7b). On the other hand, the Church is to be **like a lion among the beasts of the forest, like a young lion among flocks of sheep** (v. 8b). These two images are very different and have a very different impact. What is Micah talking about?

First, consider the **dew** and rain **showers**. In the Scripture, this gift of water is always a sign of blessing; its absence a sign of judgment.

<sup>28</sup>Then Israel shall dwell in safety, the fountain of Jacob alone, in a land of grain and new wine; His heavens shall also drop *dew* (Dt. 33:28).

<sup>1</sup>And Elijah the Tishbite, of the inhabitants of Gilead, said to Ahab, “As the LORD God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, *there shall not be dew nor rain* these years, except at my word” (1 Kgs. 17:1).

Allen points out that **dew** was much more important to the Israelites of Micah’s day than it would be to us – we get enough rainfall without needing to consider the dew. But in the land of Judah, the people depended upon the dew to keep their crops and vegetation growing, especially during the summer months when there was no rainfall.

Just like the dew and the rain showers refreshed the land and brought it life, so should the ministry of the Church be to the world around us. Israel was to be the source of life and renewal to the nations. The Church has the gospel of Christ; there is no where else for the world to turn:

<sup>67</sup>Then Jesus said to the twelve, “Do you also want to go away?” <sup>68</sup>But Simon Peter answered Him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? *You have the words of eternal life*” (John 6:67-68).

But there is a flip side to the gospel message. The “words of eternal life,” if rejected, condemn the sinner to a terrible fate. Like a **lion** devouring its helpless prey, there is no hope of deliverance. The phrase **and none can deliver** suggests God punishing His enemies:

<sup>39</sup>Now see that I, even I, am He, and there is no God besides Me; I kill and I make alive; I wound and I heal; *nor is there any who can deliver from My hand* (Dt. 32:39).

<sup>14</sup>For *I will be like a lion* to Ephraim, and *like a young lion* to the house of Judah. I, even I, will tear them and go away; I will take them away, and *no one shall rescue* (Hos. 5:14).

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This then, is the ministry of the Word of God through the Church. It is sharper than any two-edged sword (*cp.* Heb. 4:12). On the one hand, we are to be a sweet savor that draws the nations to Christ, the *righteous ruler*. On the other hand, we are to be God's force which denounces sin and wickedness. The ministry of the Church is to preach the whole gospel of Christ: sin and rebellion against God leads to eternal judgment, but repentance and faith in Jesus leads to salvation and eternal life.

The book of Proverbs sums this up nicely:

<sup>12</sup>*The king's wrath is like the roaring of a lion, but his favor is like dew on the grass (Pr. 19:13).*

### C. Pagan Purge (5:10-15)

The book *Lost in the Middle: Midlife and the Grace of God* by Paul David Tripp exposes the inherent idolatry in our lives. The so-called "midlife struggle" tends to be a clash between the idolatry of our lives being challenged by a God who will not accept second place in our hearts. Idolatry is not necessarily bowing down to pagan statues; it is replacing the best (God) with the good (created things) as first in our hearts. Tripp defines the principle of idolatry as "the desire for a good thing becomes a bad thing when that desire becomes a ruling thing" (p. 256).

Micah deals with this issue of idolatry here in this final section of Micah chapter 5. At the beginning of the chapter, Micah has described our *righteous Ruler*, who He is and what He does for His people. In the middle of this chapter, Micah has assured the people of God victory over their enemies and explained our two-fold ministry of the Word of God unto salvation or damnation. But here at the end of the chapter, Micah warns us about idolatry and replacing the Lord Jesus Christ with "other gods."

It would seem almost incredible to us that Micah would have to warn us of turning away from Christ after the awesome portrait he has just given of the *mighty Messiah*, except that we know the wickedness and deceitfulness of our own hearts (*cp.* Jer. 17:9). The whole history of the Old Testament, the New Testament, the Church Age, and our own personal lives is a testimony to this fact: even in the face of all that Christ has done for us, we tend to replace Him in our hearts with "other gods." Therefore, Micah conducts a *pagan purge* to remove the ungodly influences from our lives.

#### 1. Inbred Idolatry (5:10-14)

Micah addresses three different types of *inbred idolatry* that need to be destroyed. These practices need to be **cut off** (vv. 10, 11, 12, 13) from the people of God.

The first idol for destruction is *pride* or *self-sufficiency*. God says that He will cut off and destroy **horses, chariots, cities, and strongholds** (vv. 10-11). In other words, Judah has been relying on their military strength for protection rather than in God. Micah has already dealt with this issue in chapter 1, when he warns the fortified city of Lachish not to trust in their chariots or swift horses.

It is always a great temptation to trust in our own ability, to be proud and self-sufficient. God knows this tendency of our hearts. We are no different than the people of Micah's day. We do the same thing. We think we are somehow "better" than they are, that we are "better" than others around us, because we are well taught and grounded in the Reformed faith. Brethren, let us be careful of this attitude of pride and superiority. Listen to these wise words from Waltke:

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The church today will not prevail through her own resources — an educated clergy, the technical know-how of expositors and educational directors, inviting buildings — but only through faith in God. She must confess once again with David: ‘some trust in horses, and some in chariots, but we trust in the name of the Lord our God’ (Ps. 20:7).

The second idol for destruction is *false prophecy* and the *occult*. God says He will cut off **sorceries** and **soothsayers**. Now, I’m sure that none of you are tempted to have your palms read or have a tarot card reader tell your fortune. But we can still be guilty of falling into this trap. What is the essence of seeking the occult? It is looking for knowledge, for information. It is trying to figure out what is going on. God has already given us everything we need to know about the future in the Scriptures. We already know the end of the story – Micah told it to us himself in chapter 4. Why would we be tempted to look for knowledge in other places? But we do, whether it is looking for trends in the stock market to make it rich quick, or counting on politicians to pass the right laws or appoint the right judges to give us an advantage, and so on. Whenever we are not content with what God has revealed to us, we are tempted to seek other knowledge.

The third idol for destruction is *false worship*. God says that he will cut off the **carved images**, the **sacred pillars**, and the **wooden images** so that **you shall no more worship the work of your hands** (vv. 13-14). Again, it is unlikely that we are tempted to bow down to a statue. But we do have idols that take the place of God in our lives, whether it is a relationship, or marriage, or children, or career, or health, or money, or power, or pleasure. Many of these things are good and okay as long as they are in their proper place. Again, I repeat Tripp’s definition of idolatry: “the desire for a good thing becomes a bad thing when that desire becomes a ruling thing.”

Whether it is military strength, occultist practices, or idolatry, all of these are attempts to replace the Creator’s place in our lives with something He has created. Do we trust in Jesus Christ alone, or in our own strength? Do we look to the Spirit for truth, or do we search in all the wrong places? Do we fill our hearts with the worship of the Father, or do we replace Him with things that ultimately cannot satisfy? Sadly, Christians too often do these very things. We need to keep our hearts in the Scriptures to learn from the examples and guard our hearts against thinking it can happen to us:

<sup>11</sup>Now *all these things happened to them as examples*, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come. <sup>12</sup>Therefore *let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall*. <sup>13</sup>No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God *is faithful*, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it. <sup>14</sup>Therefore, my beloved, *flee from idolatry* (1 Cor. 10:11-14).

### 2. Godless Gentiles (5:15)

In the final verse of this chapter, Micah turns his attention to the *godless Gentiles* who are outside the people of God. Notice that God has a very different attitude regarding idolatry between His people and those outside the Church. For the Church, God will **cut off** the idolatrous things. That is, He will purge the pagan influences from our lives. It may not be pleasant or easy, but God will not allow His people to replace Him in their hearts. As Tripp writes:

## Minor Prophets: Micah & Haggai

God is willing to sacrifice what is important to us in order to reclaim our hearts. ... The one thing God is unwilling to share is our hearts. So He uses everything at His disposal to reclaim our affection, adoration, and worship. God's reclaiming actions are often devastating, but they are at the same time a sure sign of the depth and faithfulness of His love. He will not stop fighting for our hearts. He will not share us with another. He will battle to be the center of our personal universe until we are with Him in eternity (pp. 249-250).

However, the same is not true for the unconverted person. Listen to the difference in verse 15: **And I will execute vengeance in anger and fury on the nations that have not heard.** The good news is that people from many nations will have been brought into the Church, streaming into the "mountain of the Lord" (4:2). Although God saves all types of people, He does not, in His sovereign providence, save all people. There are those that have not heard. There are those who have heard and have rejected the gospel. And on those who have not bowed the knee to Christ, God promises an awful punishment.

The term "vengeance" in verse 15 is "a legal term for the action of a royal suzerain against rebels who will not acknowledge his sovereignty" (Allen). In other words, God is promising to put down the rebellion of those who will not accept His kingship in their lives. God will protect His covenant community by removing from it those who would defile it:

<sup>26</sup>And they shall bring the glory and the honor of the nations into it [the New Jerusalem].

<sup>27</sup>But *there shall by no means enter it anything that defiles*, or causes an abomination or a lie, but only those who are written in the Lamb's Book of Life (Rev. 21:26-27).

### Conclusion

We have a *mighty Messiah*. Jesus Christ is the *righteous Ruler* of His people. He gathers us to Himself and cares for us as a *strong Shepherd*. We abide in Him and are safe and secure. He is our peace. Our eternal destiny is determined.

If these things are true (and they are), why would we lose sight of Him, even for a minute, and fill our lives with physical things that cannot satisfy? Let us purge our lives of all the pagan influences and fix our eyes on Christ. I can think of no better way to summarize this chapter than to remind us of the exhortation from the writer to the Hebrews:

<sup>1</sup>Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, <sup>2</sup>looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God (Heb. 12:1-2).

Next week: Lesson 7 – What's What – Micah 6:1-16

Close in Prayer.