

A Two-fold Judgment

Micah 2:3-13; 2 Timothy 4:3-4

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When God's righteous judgment is upon a nation, it falls not only upon the body but also upon the soul of the people. Since the Lord created man body and soul from the beginning, the Lord also cursed both body and soul when Adam fell from the estate wherein he was created by sinning against God (Genesis 3:10,15-19).

Likewise, in redemption, God not only delivers the soul of the Christian from sin and eternal death in hell, but also delivers the body of the believer from the evil of affliction and of physical death in the grave. Consider the words of the *Shorter Catechism* in this regard:

Q37: What benefits do believers receive from Christ at death?

A37: The souls of believers are at their death made perfect in holiness, and do immediately pass into glory; and their bodies, being still united to Christ, do rest in their graves till the resurrection.

Q38: What benefits do believers receive from Christ at the resurrection?

A38: At the resurrection, believers being raised up in glory, shall be openly acknowledged and acquitted in the day of judgement, and made perfectly blessed in the full enjoying of God to all eternity.

The Lord continues since the fall to display a two-fold blessing upon the body and soul of a nation that enters into a matrimonial covenant to be the Lord's and walks accordingly and a two-fold cursing upon the body and soul of a nation that despises that matrimonial covenant by going after other gods and religions (Leviticus 26:6-9,11-12,31).

Dear ones, this truth deeply affects each of us, for the people and nations of England, Ireland, and Scotland and their posterity (such as the U.S., Canada, Australia, etc.) were bound in matrimony to the Lord by means of the *Solemn League and Covenant*:

. . . that we, and our posterity after us, may, as brethren, live in faith and love, and the Lord may delight to dwell in the midst of us.

That is covenantal language reminiscent of Israel's covenant with the Lord: "And I will dwell among the children of Israel, and will be their God" (Exodus 29:45). Although it is a great privilege to be married to the Lord as a nation, yet the Lord our God will not hold those guiltless who take His name in vain in their national covenants. The Lord's covenant judgment will manifest itself not only in bodily afflictions but also in spiritual delusions, not only in natural famines that destroy the body, but also in spiritual famines that destroy the soul. Dear ones, such two-fold famines from the Lord our God are not only threatened upon covenanted nations of old, but are threatened upon covenanted nations in this age as well. The prophecy of Micah was not heeded by the covenanted nations of Israel and Judah of old. Will it be heeded by the covenanted nations of today?

Thus, this Lord's Day we shall consider the Two-fold Judgment threatened against the covenanted nations of Israel and Judah: (1) The Judgment against the Body; and (2) The Judgment against the Soul.

In the previous sermon from Micah, we noted a clear contrast between the sins condemned by the Lord in Chapter 1 of Micah and Chapter 2 of Micah. For in Micah Chapter 1, the prophet declares idolatry to be the root sin for which God has brought His covenant law-suit against Israel and Judah and for which God will judge

them by sending the Assyrians and Babylonians to desolate their cities and lead them into captivity. However, in Micah Chapter 2, the prophet addresses the sins which will inevitably follow upon departing from the living God: oppressing the weak and the helpless and turning a deaf ear to their cries. God's judgment is stored up and soon to be unleashed against Israel and Judah, not only for the sin of setting up idols in their heart and in the land, but also for the sin of showing no mercy to the poor, the helpless, the oppressed, the fatherless, and the widow.

I. The Lord's Judgment Threatened against the Body of His People (i.e. a judgment that will affect their physical substance).

A. A Judgment That Is Just and Proportionate (Micah 2:3-5).

1. The Lord's judgment is measured out in accordance with the sin committed (Matthew 7:2; Luke 6:37-38). For just as Israel and Judah had "devised" iniquity against their helpless brethren (Micah 2:1), so God has "devised" evil against them in Micah 2:3 (not a moral evil, but a calamity or judgment). Just as Israel and Judah had "spoiled" (or robbed) the needy by actively taking what belonged to the poor, or by passively not heeding the cry of the helpless, so the Lord justly turns the tables on them so that they cry out, "We are utterly spoiled" (Micah 2:4). Remember the words of James 2:13: "For he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath shewed no mercy; and mercy rejoiceth against judgment" (i.e. merciful men, who have shown mercy to the saints, to their elders, and to their ministers, will not be afraid of the judgment of the Lord, but rather will rejoice in that day, for the Lord will show them mercy).

2. How prone we are first to cry out like Israel and Judah of old when we experience God's righteous chastening in our lives, "How hath he removed it from me! turning away he hath divided our fields" (Micah 2:4). In other words, "Why has the Lord afflicted me, why has He turned away from me? What have I done?"—as if we were without sin and need not the loving hand of God's chastening in our lives. Such are the sentiments of a proud heart, whereas the humble cries out to the Lord with the words of Daniel (Daniel 9:4,5,14,18).

B. A Judgment for Abused Privileges (Micah 2:10).

1. Israel and Judah had misplaced their faith and confidence. Whereas their faith and trust should have been in the Lord their God alone, they had a false sense of security that everything would be all right because God had graciously given them many external privileges which were intended not as ends in themselves, but as means to the one end: to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever. They gloried in their outward privileges, but not in the God who bestowed those privileges. AThe Lord had given them the land of Israel, the temple, the priesthood to signify the rest and the peace they had in the Lord (i.e. that only in Christ is the curse of the Law removed from us, only in Him is there reconciliation).

2. You see, they had separated the Lord from His benefits. How many professing Christians like the blessings of salvation, but despise the trials of the cross? It is a package. If we would share in His glory, we must share in His sufferings. If we would have Christ as Savior, we must have Him as Lord. If we would have Christ as our Priest, we must also have Him as our Prophet and King. If we would have God as Father, we must receive His loving rebuke and fatherly chastening. If we would have the Holy Spirit, we must receive His comforts, but also His conviction.

3. Because Israel and Judah trusted in their land, their temple, and all their outward privileges, the Lord said to them, "Arise ye, and depart; for this is not your rest" (Micah 2:10). In other words, "Because you have polluted it by trusting in it, it shall be your destruction." Again, we see the justice of God in that He judges the people by turning that in which they trust against them (whether armies, wealth, approval of man, pleasures, technology, or external privileges). External privileges such as our national covenant to be the Lord's make us more accountable to trust Him, to obey Him, and to love Him (to whom much is given much is required).

C. A Judgment Which the Lord Himself Leads (Micah 2:12-13).

1. As we consider briefly these words, I should note that there are those who have interpreted these verses to be a pledge of God's mercy that would yet be poured out upon those covenanted nations. And it is certainly true that the Lord does in the prophetic writings promise that His mercy will yet be extended to Israel and Judah, for although they may forget their covenant with the Lord, yet the Lord will not forget His covenant with them. However, others have understood Micah 2:12-13 to refer to the judgment God would bring upon Israel and Judah and with these I am in agreement.

2. I submit to you the following considerations. First, the immediate context is one of God's judgments without any apparent transition to God's blessing. Second, the Hebrew word for "assemble" is used for an assembling of God's judgment within the walls of Jerusalem and other cities of Judah (Jeremiah 8:14). Finally, the word "breaker" in Micah 2:13 (in its participial form) is never used of a blessed breaking, but only of a cursed breaking. In other words, this breaker most likely refers to the Babylonian king who broke down the walls of Jerusalem.

3. Calvin notes the following in his commentary on this passage:

So, in the present passage, God declares that there would be a gathering of the people,—for what purpose? Not that being united together they might enjoy the blessings of God, but that they might be destroyed.

This view is also endorsed by Beza (Calvin's successor) in the notes to the *Geneva Bible*, and by the *Westminster Annotations* among others.

4. Although the Lord would use earthly means and human agency to bring His judgment upon Israel and Judah, nevertheless, let none mistake who it is that is going before the Assyrians and the Babylonians in leading these backslidden covenanted nations into captivity: "and the LORD on the head of them" (Micah 2:13). The Lord Himself shall be at the head of them, leading Israel and Judah into captivity.

5. What about the external afflictions that come to the child of God? Whether illnesses, natural catastrophes, death of children or loved ones, unwanted divorce, persecution, or economic disruption? How should we view these trials? We must not separate God from His essential attributes. Just as we cannot separate Christ from His benefits, so we cannot separate God from His attributes, otherwise we form a god of our own imagination.

a. First, we must not dissociate the sovereignty of God from anything that happens to us in our lives. God has eternally decreed all that comes into the lives of His children (Ephesians 1:11).

b. Second, we must not dissociate the wisdom of God from anything that happens to us in our lives. God is not shortsighted, nor does He ever have to apologize because He didn't foresee something in advance (Romans 11:34). We simply see a slice of life and how it affects us. We do not see the end from the beginning and how it affects not only ourselves but others.

c. Third, we must not dissociate the love of God from anything that happens to us in our lives. God even intends and uses the most severe trials for our good (Genesis 50:20; Romans 8:28).

D. Fourth, we must not dissociate the righteousness of God from anything that happens to us in our lives. The chastening of the Lord comes to us not only for our rebellion, but also for our instruction and growth (James 1:2-3; 1 Peter 4:12-16; 2 Corinthians 12:7).

II. The Lord's Judgment Threatened against the Soul of His People.

A. A Judgment of Silence (Micah 2:6-7).

1. The people of Israel and Judah take up the words against God's prophets and ministers found in Micah 2:6: "Prophesy ye not." In other words, "Stop prophesying to us concerning our sins and

concerning the judgment of the Lord. We don't want to hear such negative messages any more. We want to hear sermons that are positive and upbeat, sermons that promise us peace and prosperity." Thus, we see time and again how the kings, priests, false prophets and general populace sought to silence the faithful prophets of the Lord (Jeremiah 26:8), our Lord, the apostles, and faithful witnesses (Revelation 11).

2. God's judgment is fitted to the sin, for if they would silence the faithful preaching of God's Word, if they would close their ears, and turn their hearts away from faithful ministers, they shall have silence from the Lord.

3. The prophet says in effect (Micah 2:7), "You call yourselves the house of Jacob, but here you are trying to fit the Spirit of the Lord who speaks through His faithful ministers into your comfortable lifestyle. Were these the doings of Jacob? Did he silence the Word of the Lord? Don't you understand that even my words of threatened judgment are intended for your benefit and good?" You see, dear ones, we see either the humility or the pride in our life in the way we respond to God's so-called negative messages, to God's rebuke, to God's correction which comes through ministers, elders, parents, subordinates, and peers. It is not for your destruction that God warns you concerning His judgment. It is not because the Lord despises you that He rebukes you. To the contrary, it is for your benefit and blessing that the Lord sends His warnings that you might turn to Him and enjoy His pleasure rather than His displeasure. Do you proudly plug your ears to that which you don't like, or do you humbly open them because you realize you are a sinner in constant need of God's correction? Consider the sobering words of Proverbs 1:20-33.

B. A Judgment of Delusion (Micah 2:11).

1. Not only does the Lord give silence to them who will not receive His Word, but He also sends deception, confusion, lukewarmness, apathy, indifference, and callousness in the soul. If we would rather believe a lie than the truth, God will give us over to our desires (God sent a lying spirit into the mouths of the false prophets so that Ahab might believe their word because he chose not to believe the faithful preaching of Micaiah in 1 Kings 22; Paul's sobering words in 2 Thessalonians 2:10-11).

2. Dear ones, how important it is that you so crave the truth of God that you do not submit yourselves to ministers because you like what they say, or because they are dynamic preachers, or because they are entertaining, or because they have a large following, or because they have several degrees behind their name. You should submit yourselves to ministers because they faithfully preach the whole counsel of God without apology or compromise. You should submit to such ministers because they demonstrate themselves to be the ministers of Christ and not the ministers of the fashionable multitude. You should submit yourselves to such ministers because you love Christ, because you love His Word, and because you want to hear the Lord through His preached Word rather than having your ears tickled (2 Timothy 4:3-4).

3. Because of these obstinate sins, the Lord yet comes to His people through His prophet Micah and through His faithful ministers pleading in mercy to repent. Remember that although these prophecies contain God's threatened judgment, they yet are filled with God's mercy to turn to Him and be healed (Ezekiel 33:11: "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?"). Hear the gracious invitation of Christ today. Turn not a deaf ear to His call. Don't wait to feel the level of conviction you think you should have before coming to Christ. Don't wait till you have gotten rid of that sinful habit. Come to the Lord now. Embrace Him now in all of His sufficiency, power, love, righteousness, mercy, and grace; "for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength."

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