

Where Is the Lord? Knowing God's Sovereign Presence in Times of Grief and Trial

Micah 4:9-13; Matthew 12:20

December 30, 2007

Rev. Greg L. Price

Where is the Lord when the enemy seems to prevail against us? To what are we to cling when the cause of Christ, for which we have struggled and suffered loss, seems to limp along more like a man on crutches than a man in a race? Dear ones, we are not in a sprint so that in 10 seconds we have run the race set before us, but rather we are in a marathon that requires endurance and perseverance. We are in this race for the long haul, but we are far from alone. The Lord has promised: "When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee" (Isaiah 43:2). God takes us through such trials so that we never forget that the Kingdom of God is not built by our might or by our power, but only and always by the sovereign and gracious Spirit of God. What a comfort it is to rest in the wisdom of God, who always does what is best, and to trust in the knowledge of God, who knows the end from the beginning and who has determined that the Kingdom of Christ will envelop all nations of the world. Dear ones, the Lord has not fallen asleep or grown weary in His own cause. He will arouse Himself, and like a mighty warrior, He will abase His enemies and defend His people.

Turn with me this Lord's Day to Micah 4:9-13 as we consider the word of the Lord to Israel of old as she sought to understand the ways of the Lord while in the midst of her suffering. The main points of the sermon are as follows: (1) The Travail of Israel (Micah 4:9-10a); (2) The Deliverance of Israel (Micah 4:10b-13a); and (3) The Consecration of the Nations (Micah 4:13b).

I. The Travail of Israel (Micah 4:9-10a).

A. Micah chapter 4 details the blessings of the Millennium in the last days when the Spirit of God will draw the nations of the world unto Christ (Micah 4:2). The fulfillment of this prophecy was even yet future to the Apostle Paul when he spoke concerning the same worldwide ingathering of the nations to Christ in Romans 11:25. There Paul prophesies that a time is coming before the Second Coming of Christ in which "the fullness of the Gentiles" (i.e. the nations of the world) will be brought to Christ and the restoration of all Israel to Christ will be accomplished. Then a glorious time of peace and unity among the nations of the world and in the Church of Christ throughout the whole world will reign upon the earth.

B. However, before the fulfillment of these glorious prophecies, there were times of sorrow and heartache that awaited Israel according to the Prophet Micah (note the shift in tense and the shift in content from Micah 4:8 to Micah 4:9). Israel would not be immediately brought into the joys of that Millennial Kingdom, but would rather first pass through the purging fires of God's chastening. This seems in general to be the Lord's order, whether it be Israel, the RPNA (GM), or you as an individual Christian. If you would reign with Christ, you must first suffer with Christ (2 Timothy 2:12). If you would be exalted, you must first be humbled (James 4:10). Remember that Joseph was sold into slavery by his brothers before he was exalted to reign with Pharaoh. Israel served Egypt for some four hundred years before inheriting the Promise Land. It was even necessary that Christ suffer the rejection of His own people and the wrath of God before being seated at God's right hand on the throne of David in heaven (Acts 2:30-36). Dear ones, whenever you as God's children suffer, remember that suffering is not an end in itself, but that suffering is always preparing you to enjoy the Lord's blessings (both in this life and in heaven to come).

C. The suffering of Israel of old before her time of gracious exaltation is likened by Micah to a kind of suffering which men cannot fully appreciate (except perhaps from a distance): the suffering of a woman

who labors in travail to bring forth her child (Micah 4:9-10a). When God wants to convey the concepts of suffering and anguish through which His people will pass, He many times compares it to the pain associated with the birthing process (Jeremiah 6:24). Yes, promised glory and blessing lie in the future for Israel, but now is the time of judgment and chastening for her many sins committed against the Lord and against the helpless among her (Micah 1:3-5; Micah 2:1-2). Judgment shall fall upon her in the future for her rejection and crucifixion of her anointed Savior and King (Matthew 21:33-45).

D. What form will this temporal judgment take that will be brought upon Israel? Israel will cry out loudly because all those who did not die of famine or pestilence during the siege of Jerusalem would suffer even more greatly by the rape, slaughter, and torture brought upon them by the Babylonians about one hundred years from the time of this prophecy and by the Romans about 750 years after this prophecy (in 70 A.D.). The temple of the Lord was destroyed and the walls of Jerusalem were left in shambles by Nebuchadnezzar. And though it was rebuilt, it was destroyed again by the Romans as it is to this very day. Israel's king, her princes, her judges, and wise counselors were not to be found in Jerusalem because they were led into Babylonian captivity (2 Kings 25:7) and into Roman captivity (Luke 21:24).

E. Dear children of God, the Lord in many ways deals with us individually as he dealt with Israel nationally. Will the Lord chasten us when we go astray as He did Israel? Will He at times allow our enemies to seemingly triumph over us as He did Israel? Will He bring us into periods of our life where it seems as though we are in bondage to some sin from which we seem not able to flee? Yes indeed. When Christ walked upon the earth, it was fulfilled concerning Him what was spoken by Isaiah the prophet: "A bruised reed shall he not break, and smoking flax shall he not quench" (Matthew 12:20). You see, dear ones, Christ does in His love for us bruise us, so that we are brought to our knees before Him, but He will not break those who trust in Christ alone for their only righteousness. And Christ does cause the light of His countenance within us to grow dim at times, like a flax reed that is barely burning, but He will not quench or put it out when even the faintest glimmer of fire comes from it.

F. What is the Lord doing by His bruising and dimming ministry in times of great travail, sorrow, persecution, discouragement? Let me suggest several purposes for our bruising and dimming.

1. When Christ bruises us, He causes us to take a long serious look at our sin in all of its manifestations—whether secret or public sins, whether intentional or ignorant sins; whether sins against God or sins against our neighbor, whether sins committed in worship, at home, or on the job; whether sins of the mind, mouth, eyes, hands, or feet; whether sins against a family member or against a stranger; whether sins of neglect and forgetfulness or sins of actual commission. Dear ones, we will never know the mercy of Christ until we know sincere and earnest grief and sorrow for our sins (2 Corinthians 7:10).

2. When Christ bruises us, He causes us to be humbled before Him. If we would be exalted before the Lord, we must first be humbled. Pride and arrogance corrupt us all to varying degrees. We rob God of His glory by taking credit for what we do or what we have. We compare ourselves to others, so as to make ourselves look better. We glory in our appearance, in our intellect, in our works, in our gifts, when the Lord declares that everything we have is a gift from Him (1 Corinthians 4:7). Even the thorn in the flesh given to Paul was given so as to keep him from boasting (2 Corinthians 12:7).

3. When Christ bruises us, He sends us to Himself in order to bind up our wounds, for He has come to heal the broken-hearted (Luke 4:18), and in order to prize Him above all things upon the earth. Apart from this bruising and dimming ministry, dear ones, we would be like wayward children seldom sensing our need of Christ. But when we fall into some besetting sin, discouragement, fear, trial, affliction, financial setback, loss of a loved one, or spiritual dryness, we are driven from ourselves and from the arm of flesh to seek the mercy seat of Christ. Like the woman with the issue of blood who had spent all of her money on doctors to be healed (Mark 5:26), so we are brought to the place that there is no one who can help us in our

travail, but Jesus. If we in all of our weakness, will but touch the hem of His garment, in faith believing that He will hear us, He will run to meet us as the father did with His prodigal son, and will carry us like a precious little lamb into the secret place of the Most High, where we will find safety and refuge from the attacks of the enemy.

4. When Christ bruises us, He turn us from our hypocrisy to a true and living faith (Revelation 3:15-20).

5. When Christ bruises us, He leads us to be thankful for all of God's mercies and to cease from all our murmuring and complaining (1 Thessalonians 5:18). A murmuring spirit reveals a discontented person who is unbelieving, discontent and covetous. This is tempting God as did Israel of old (1 Corinthians 10:9-10). Those who are not praising God throughout the day for His goodness will also be inclined to be sinfully critical of others in the family or in the church. They will find fault at every turn. They will sow seeds of discord wherever they go.

6. When Christ bruises us, He stretches us from our comfort zones in order to build us up in trust and confidence in Christ—in order to demonstrate to us that we can do all things through Christ who strengthens us, regardless of the foes we face and the fears that we have.

7. When Christ bruises us, He teaches us that our chief joy is not in the things of this life, but in Him (Philippians 1:21). As we lay dying and breathing our last breath, and as the possessions of this life slip through our fingers like grains of sand, that which alone will overcome the fear of death is the righteousness of Christ. Only the righteousness of our Savior will direct us from the condemnation that we deserve to the justification that is ours by grace through faith alone in Christ alone. Dear ones, the One who brings us out of restlessness and into peace in every fearful circumstance which we face in this life is the same One who will bring us out of restlessness and into peace on the day of our death. We are learning now through every trial that we face how to rest in Christ as our peace and joy.

II. The Deliverance of Israel (Micah 4:10b-13a).

A. The Lord is the Deliverer of His people, even out of seeming impossible circumstances. Micah says in verses 11 and 12 that Israel's enemies are gathered with the purpose of destroying her, but the Lord of hosts has gathered the enemies together in one place for a different purpose: so as to conquer them (just as when Elisha was surrounded by the Syrian army in 2 Kings 6). The Lord brings the enemy to the very doorstep of His people, so as to make their fall all the more conspicuous and evident to all, and so that all know that He has done it.

B. It is interesting that Micah emphasizes that God's deliverance occurs "there", while they are in Babylon (Micah 4:10b). That nation which will be the greatest political power on the earth, Babylon, even from Babylon shall Israel be delivered. God did indeed deliver Israel from Babylon, 70 years after Israel had been led into captivity, and a faithful remnant returned to the land of Israel to rebuild the temple and the city of Jerusalem (under Ezra and Nehemiah, Zerubbabel and Joshua, Haggai and Zechariah). You will recall how the Lord provided miraculous deliverances for His people at the time of King Hezekiah when the Assyrians besieged Jerusalem. The Lord delivered Israel from the oppression of the Syrians through the work of the Maccabees in the second century before Christ. However, Israel was again sent into captivity by the Romans for her rejection and crucifixion of Christ and her persecution of His apostles. But just as Israel was delivered from Babylon, so she shall be delivered from her spiritual captivity and restored to Christ and her promised land at the time of the blessed Millennium, when Christ will reign over Israel and the nations from His throne in heaven (Zechariah 12-14; Acts 2:35).

C. To "redeem" (in Micah 4:10b) means to purchase or to pay for the freedom of one who is in bondage. Micah says, "There in Babylon shall the Lord redeem you from your enemies." The redemption in

view here from Babylon was redemption from a political power. But the word used here for redeem is the same root word used in Leviticus 25:25 where one who was sold into slavery due to his poverty could be redeemed by an act of kindness on the part of a kinsmen redeemer. He must be related, and He must pay the remaining debt. Only then can he set the relative free. The Lord (in Micah 4:10b) gives us a foreshadowing of a far more blessed and significant type of redemption. The redemption of sinful men by a kinsmen Redeemer, who became a relative by becoming man, paid in full the debt of sin, and bore God's infinite wrath, so as to deliver His people from their sins. Oh the deep, deep love of Jesus that came so low and suffered so much to set us free. Having now suffered and paid the price, having legally defeated Satan, sin, the world, death, and hell, what enemy remains that could completely and totally conquer us who have Christ? What sin cannot be overcome when Christ has already died for all our sin? What can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus? Nothing! Absolutely nothing!

D. The deliverance of Israel spoken of here also addresses her trampling down her enemies, or rather Christ trampling down her enemies for her, which will be nationally realized in its most complete sense when all Israel is called to Christ in these last days (as we see in Zechariah 12-14).

III. The Consecration of the Nations (Micah 4:13b).

A. Here the Lord comforts His people with the promise that He will devote all the gain, all of the substance, and all of the wealth of the conquered enemies to Himself and to the benefit of His people (as in the case of the plundering of the Egyptians when Israel was set free from Egypt; note also that Paul says that all things are ours in 1 Corinthians 3:21-23). The glory of the nations will be brought into Israel and into the Visible Church of which Israel will be a part. We may presently be poor and unable to do all that we would like to do, because our resources are so small, because our numbers are so small, and because we cannot financially sustain an on-going church court. But our confidence is not in our resources, but rather, our confidence is in "the Lord of the whole earth." Just as the Lord caused the wealth of Media and Persia to be freely given so that the Temple of the Lord might be restored (at the time of Ezra and Nehemiah), even so shall the Lord cause the wealth of the nations to be freely given so that the glory of His New Covenant Temple (that is, Church of Christ) might flourish in every nation. Dear ones, even if the Lord has only used us within the RPNA (GM) to resurrect the buried truth of the descending obligation of the sacred Covenants of our forefathers (the National Covenant and the Solemn League and Covenant) before the inauguration of the Millennium or the buried truth of Divine right Presbyterianism that shall unify the nation and church under the banner of Christ and our sacred covenant, the Lord has still used us for His own glorious purpose and is preparing us for greater things to come.

B. I submit to you that there is another Babylon spoken of in Scripture far more dangerous and cruel than the Babylon of old which ruled for only one hundred years or so. In Revelation 17, the Apostle John is given a vision of another Babylon who in verse 5 is called: "MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH." The rule of this Babylon and its popish antichrist will last for 42 prophetic months (according to Revelation 13:5) or 1,260 prophetic days which is 1,260 actual years (where one prophetic day equals one actual year as we see in Ezekiel 4:6 and Daniel 9:24). This woman (in Revelation 17:5) is not a pure wife, as is the faithful Church of Christ (2 Corinthians 11:2), but is rather a harlot (a corrupt and unfaithful Church). This is the Romish Church which is ruled over by the papal antichrist (2 Thessalonians 2:3-4). Consider that she is dressed in purple and scarlet (the colors of her bishops and cardinals). She is decked with much wealth (gold, precious stones, and pearls). She offers her cup of the mass, which signifies all of her abominations and fornications in polluting the purity of doctrine, worship, and government of the faithful Church of Christ. She is drunk with the blood of the saints and martyrs of Christ (history is filled with her bloody persecution and slaughter of millions of Christians). She has enslaved the souls

of men by her abominable doctrine, worship, and government (Revelation 18:13). Note that she is the mother of harlots, which implies that she has daughters (various churches that have introduced to varying degrees the whore's doctrine, her worship, and her government into their churches): for example, her abominations into their doctrine (a man-centered salvation), into their worship (man-inspired hymns, use of instruments into worship, images and pictures of Christ, Christmas and other so-called holy days), and into their government (the tyranny of binding the consciences of men with the mere dictates of the pope). This is a more cruel and dangerous Babylon for which we must ever be on guard and must come out from her and out from all her daughters (Revelation 18:4). God's people, though enslaved in this spiritual Babylon, experienced a great deliverance at the time of the Protestant Reformation, but have since that time been ever so gradually drawn back to this mystery Babylon, not so much by formally uniting with her (although more and more churches are lining up to discuss how this may be achieved), but by adopting so many of her poisonous teachings and practices. I submit to you that the Church of Christ has since the Reformation returned in varying degrees to that Babylonian captivity from which she was redeemed by her Savior. The saddest part about the present Babylonian captivity is that Israel of old knew that she had been led into captivity, whereas the church of this age has no idea that she is in captivity.

However, we rejoice, for the same God that assured Israel of old that she would be delivered from her captivity, has also promised that the faithful Church of Christ will be delivered from the Romish harlot. For the Lord of Hosts will completely destroy her as the dawn of the Millennial Kingdom breaks forth (Revelation 19).

Copyright 2007.