

Abiding Fruit

Informing the Mind & Inflaming the Heart

Vol. 2 No. 33

May 6, 2007

The Transgression & Remnant of Jacob **Micah 1:5; 5:7, 8**

The prophet Micah was a contemporary of Isaiah, and as such, he prophesied about the Assyrian destruction of Israel, the northern kingdom, and about the future Babylonian captivity for Judah, the southern kingdom. Micah prophesied during the reigns of the Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah (1:1) so he was an eighth century B.C. prophet. He lived in the town of Moresheth in Judea which was not far from Jerusalem.

Micah essentially has 3 messages to deliver to the people from God (1:2 – 2:13; 3 – 5; 6 – 7). In each of these messages, the prophet invites the people to hear or listen to his prophecy. Micah uses the future destruction of Israel by Assyria as a warning for Judah's future destruction by the Babylonians. His prophecy is a warning to Judah that judgment from God would come in the form of Babylonian destruction (609 – 586 BC), because they were just as guilty as the northern kingdom was (who also would experience God's judgment in 722 BC).

The people of God are a covenantal people. They are under covenant and therefore are bound by the terms of the covenant. In the New Testament, believers are under the New Covenant (Jer. 31; Heb. 8, 10). The application of Jeremiah's New Covenant applies to the church, who are the people of God. Indeed, it is legitimate to refer to the Church as the Israel of God. The Israel of God is comprised of both Jews and Gentiles. Towards the end of time, God will bring in from physical Israel a believing remnant, but they too, will be part of the Church (Rom. 11:2, 5, 6, 11, 12, 25 – 36). There is only one people of God. Many believe there are two peoples of God, yet the election of God is quite specific and clear, including both Jews and Gentiles from before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:3 – 14; 2 Tim. 1:9 – 14).

The first phrase for us to consider together is *"for the transgression of Jacob."* This phrase occurs twice in Micah 1:5. The prophet uses it to demonstrate that Judah is guilty before God and God is coming in judgment upon them (1:2 – 4). Graphic language describes God's coming in judgment. God is coming from His holy temple, out of His place, coming down to tread upon the earth's high places. God is coming as a witness against His people. When God comes in judgment, the mountains melt before Him and the valleys split open. These are the results of God's judgment (see. vv. 3, 4).

It should be noted that there is a double reference to both the northern kingdom (Israel, Samaria) and the southern kingdom (Judah, Jerusalem) in verse 5. God views the transgression of Jacob as belonging to the entire nation (see also 2:12; 3:1, 8, 9). The word *"transgression"* occurs four times in Micah (1:5; 3:8; 6:7; 7:18). The sins of the nation center in idolatry. From the captivity of the northern kingdom in 722 BC to Assyria, the decline of Judah was palpable. There was a refusal to give up their sins and return to the Lord. This was the message of the prophets. God promises forgiveness and restoration if repentance was demonstrated. This is still the same standard by which God works. He requires repentance as an evidence of genuine faith. We know this is true, because we are to examine faith in the light of its fruit. What does it produce? Does it produce fruit in keeping with the profession made? John the Baptist was particularly concerned about repentance as was Jesus (Matt. 3:1 – 12; 7:15 – 20; cf. Acts 26:20).

Both Israel and Judah were reluctant to let go of their sins. They wanted the blessing of God and indeed claimed that God was on their side despite what the prophets of God were telling them. Jeremiah is a classic example of this. Time and time again, he warned the king, the leaders and the people of his day about the approaching Babylonian invasion, and they refused to listen to him. This was, of course, a refusal to listen to God. The New Testament warns Christians against idolatry (1 Cor. 10:14; Gal. 5:20; Col. 3:5; 1 Pet. 4:3; 1 John 5:21). Idolatry is forbidden by God (Ex. 20:3 - 6). It is a breaking of His holy Law. This was the transgression of Israel and Judah. Their transgressions involved other practices and injustices, but their captivity is largely attributed to their propensity to and for idolatry. Judah especially was guilty of many sins (see 2:1 – 11). They were materialistic which was expressed through coveting their neighbor's fields and homes. They even went so far as to take these if they wanted. They defrauded each other through stealing. There were false prophets who preached lies. These were some of their sins. God will always judge sinners and their sins.

In the light of their transgression, Micah refers to the remnant of Jacob in Micah 5:7, 8. In spite of sin and sinful conditions, God is saving His people. Micah 5 begins with the famous prophecy concerning the birthplace of Messiah (5:2). Messiah is equated with the eternal God as a ruler who will come forth and whose origins are from of everlasting. Jesus is therefore the eternal God who always has been in existence. This is Jacob's Messiah and God.

God has always had a remnant. It is a believing remnant. Micah 4 lays great stress on the remnant that believes and is rescued by the Lord. Many interpreters place these events in a future Millennial kingdom. I have great difficulty with this because in Micah 4:7, the remnant has the Lord reigning over them in Mount Zion forever (see also vs. 5). It is this eternal aspect that makes me view this as a reference to the Church as the people of God. Certainly the writer to the Hebrews clarifies Mount Zion for us when he tells us in Hebrews 12:22 that we have not come to the mountain that blazed with fire, but we (the Church, the people of God) have come to Mount Zion and to the city of God, the heavenly Jerusalem. This surely is a reference to the eternal state or the presence of God in heaven as opposed to an earthly sphere. The Hebrews passage is also a present reality for every believer in Christ. If one feels reluctant to view this as the whole Church (Jew and Gentile) it may be limited to a the believing remnant of Jews who will come to Christ in the latter days (Rom. 11). The people of God are never viewed as either Jew or Gentile but as one body, one people. Paul mentions that before Christ came the Gentiles were far off (Eph. 2:13), but this no longer the case, and there is no distinction between Jew and Gentile in the church. We are one people, and I, believe may be viewed as the Israel of God as Paul calls the Church in Galatians 6:16 – *“and as for all who walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, even upon the Israel of God.”* I believe Paul equates the *“them”* with the *“Israel of God”* (Gal. 6:16). This remnant in Micah shall be unique among all others for the simple reason that they are the Lord's.

God has not saved all men. This is not a reflection on any unfairness on God's part, but is simply an acknowledgment of His glorious sovereignty. God saves sinners and He saves those whom He actually saves. He forgives their transgressions and sins. This is a direct consequence of and fulfillment of the New Covenant. God has promised to forgive us and never to remember our sins. This gives great hope because only a great and merciful God can do this. If God were not merciful to us, we would have surely perished long ago. What is even more wonderful is the fact that God calls Himself our God and us, His People. He gives to His people a heart of flesh and removes the heart of stone (Ezek. 36:22 – 28). The remnant has an effect upon the nations (Mic. 5:7, 8). They are like dew from the Lord, like showers on the grass. The people of God are to be refreshment to others. The remnant is like a lion in its strength. It operates in the power of the Lord. It need fear no man or nation. This is why Jesus sends us out as disciples because all authority in heaven and on earth is His. Authority on earth is not Satan's, but Christ's. Satan's dominion was defeated at Calvary in fulfillment of Genesis 3:15. The doom of Satan and our sins was accomplished at the Cross by our Lord Jesus Christ, so let us live as His remnant people.

This material may be reproduced and distributed in any way providing the wording remains unchanged and Russ Atmore is the acknowledged author. No fee may be charged for distributing this material. Abiding Fruit is produced weekly for the congregation of Bethel Community Church.