Synopsis of the Books of the Bible

Micah

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Introduction

The date and character of Micah's prophecy

The prophecy of Micah is of the same date, and, up to a certain point, has the same character as that of Isaiah. That is to say, it treats especially of the introduction of the Messiah into the scene of the development of God's dealings towards Israel, and even speaks particularly of His presence in connection with the attack of the Assyrian This prophecy has nevertheless its own peculiar character; it enters, like those of Hosea and Amos, into the moral condition of the people, and connects the judgment of the world at large with the condition of the Jews, as we have had it typically brought before us in Jonah. Samaria also is in part the subject of this prophecy, so that its application extends to all Israel.

Chapter 1

Jehovah speaks to the whole earth from His temple

The Lord speaks in this book from His temple, and addresses all the peoples — the whole earth. That is to say, He takes His place upon His earthly throne to judge the whole earth, in testimony against all the nations. But He comes from on high, coming forth out of His place to tread upon the high places of the earth. And all that is lifted up shall be molten under Him, and all that is abased shall be as wax before the fire. And wherefore this intervention in judgment? Why does He not leave the nations still to walk in their own ways, afar from Him, in long-sufferance to their folly? It is because His own people, the witness for His name upon the earth, are in transgression against Him — have given themselves up to the service of other gods, or to iniquity. There is no longer any testimony of God in the earth, except indeed it be a false testimony; and God must therefore render it to Himself. All the sins of the nations then come into remembrance before Him, and spread themselves out before eyes that cannot endure them. He leaves His people to the consequences of their sin, so that they fall under the power of their enemies, whose pride on this account rises to such a height that it brings down the judgment of God, who intervenes to deliver the remnant whom He loves and to take His place of righteous Ruler over all the nations.

The Assyrian as the rod of God

We have already seen, more than once, that the Assyrian plays the principal part in these closing scenes of the ways of God upon the earth. We again find him here as the rod of God — a prominent subject in the prophecy of Micah.

The cause of God's just judgment

Micah 1:6-8. The iniquity of Samaria, and her graven images are the cause of the terrible scourge, according to the just judgment of God; and the waves of this flood reach even to Judah.

The warning of present events introduces the judgment of the last days

It will be remarked here, that the events which took place in the days of the prophet who speaks, having the same moral character as the definitive judgment of the last days, are used to introduce the grand action of that judgment, while also as a warning to the people for the time then present. We have already seen this, more than once, in the prophets.

The Assyrian at the gates of Jerusalem

Shalmaneser and Sennacherib are doubtless in view here; but they are only the occasion of the prophecy, looked at in its full extent. The Assyrian comes up to the gates of Jerusalem. His progress is described in verses 11-16, as in Isaiah, only that the description is more intermingled with the causes of the judgment upon the different cities that he attacks than it is in Isaiah, who enumerates them rather as the stages of his march.

Chapter 2

Violence and shameless oppression the moral causes of God's judgment

In Micah 2 the prophet points out the moral causes of the judgment of God — violence and shameless oppression. They formed plans of violence to gratify their covetousness, and Jehovah formed also plans of judgment upon them (v. 1-5). They refused the word of testimony. It shall be taken from them accompanied by this terrible judgment, that the spirit of error and drunkenness should be prophecy for them.* They rose up as an enemy: their wickedness spared neither women nor children (v. 8-9). Jehovah calls on all who have ears to hear, to arise and separate themselves from all this iniquity. A state of things like this could not be the rest of God's people. How could the saints of Jehovah rest amid pollution? (v. 10-11). Nevertheless Jehovah in no wise renounced His settled purpose of blessing with respect to Israel. He would gather them all together, the numerous flock of His protection. The breaker, He who would clear the way and overthrow every obstacle, should go before them. They should go forth from the place of their captivity. Their king should pass on before them, and Jehovah at their head (v. 12-13). {* Verse 6 is exceedingly obscure. I doubt that the Authorised Version is correct. 'Take shame' is to be ashamed: The Hebrew has hardly this sense. It is literally, Prophesy (Drop) not. They prophesy. They shall not prophesy to them; it shall not depart shame (literally shames). That is, I suppose, Shame shall not depart. Micah 3:7 explains it perhaps.}

Chapter 3

The heads and princes of Jacob denounced: God will not hear nor answer them

Micah 3. The prophet again denounces the heads and princes of Jacob. They should cry unto Jehovah. But He would not hear them. No prophet should enlighten them with the light of His word. The seers should be confounded; there should be no answer from God (v. 1-7). It was not thus with the prophet, full of power by the Spirit of Jehovah to declare unto Jacob his transgression and unto Israel his sin (v. 8). This he does by again denouncing the chiefs among the people who judged for reward, and the prophets who divined for money, while they claimed the privilege of Jehovah's presence, granted indeed exclusively to this people. Nothing can be more offensive to Jehovah than that those who have the name of His people should clothe themselves with the privilege of His presence, and use this pretension to honour self and justify evil, or maintain a divine claim in spite of it. Therefore should Zion be plowed as a field, and the mountains, now ornamented with palaces, should be made like the heights of a forest (v. 9-12).

Chapter 4

Prophecies of judgment concluded by promises of full re-establishment of glory and blessing

Micah 4. But again the prophet, in the spirit of Isaiah, concludes his denunciations of sin, and his prophecies of judgment and desolation, by announcing the full re-establishment of blessing and glory in Zion. The Spirit repeats (there was no room for change) the declaration of the glory of Zion in the last days, given in Isaiah 2. But, the prophecy being much less developed, it connects this declaration immediately with the events of the last days. Israel should dwell in perfect peace, consequent on God's rebuking the strong nations and judging among the peoples (v. 3-4); and Jehovah is exalted amongst them. Each nation, say they, will boast of its God: but Jehovah is our God for ever and ever. Jehovah is the glory of His people. In that day Jehovah will accept the remnant of His people; He will assemble the poor, feeble, halting Jacob, and reunite that which He had scattered and afflicted. It should be the remnant of His desire; that which He had cast off should be a strong nation. Jehovah Himself would reign over them in Zion for ever.

Double judgment on Jerusalem; captivity and deliverance; striking event of her last days

Nevertheless, though the prophecy be less developed, the order of the events through which the people had to pass is brought out only so much the clearer by the shortness of the prophecy, which is thus a key to the more lengthened developments of Isaiah. The prophet announces that "the first dominion," the kingdom of David and Solomon, shall return to Jerusalem: and with this statement the direct announcement of the millennial state of blessedness closes. But, meanwhile, the royalty with which the glory of Jerusalem was connected had to be set aside (v. 9): a double judgment on Jerusalem connected itself with this. The daughter of Jerusalem must go to Babylon, and there be delivered and redeemed from the hand of her enemies, by the power of God. She was to be their captive, far away from Zion. That is, the captivity of Jerusalem amidst the Gentile monarchies is announced. It was while in this

condition deliverance would be granted to her. But another event was to characterise these last days of her history. Many nations should be assembled against her, seeking to profane her and to gaze insultingly upon her (this is the attack made upon Jerusalem when Jehovah was dealing with her in her own place); but they who came up against her knew not the thoughts of Jehovah. He had gathered them together as sheaves into the threshing-floor. The daughter of Zion should trample on them and beat them in pieces, and consecrate their spoils unto Jehovah, who in that day will magnify His name of the God of the whole earth (compare Isa. 17:12-14; and Zech. 14:2; 12:2-3; Ps. 83).

Chapter 5

The Messiah and His rejection

Micah 5. But there was something more definite still to be declared; the principal enemy of the last days was to be pointed out, and this in special connection with another and fatal sin of Jerusalem and her people. The Messiah and His rejection are introduced. The daughter of troops gathers herself in troops to besiege Jerusalem — the Assyrian army (see v. 5). But here it is quite a different thing from the attack of Sennacherib. Judah had now plunged much deeper into sin and rebellion. The true Judge of Israel should be smitten with a rod upon the cheek. The Christ should be mocked and beaten.

The birthplace of Christ predicted: the eternal glory of His person

Verse 2 describes Him in a striking manner. It was on this verse that the scribes and chief priests rested, when they certified Herod that Christ should be born in Bethlehem. It represents Him as being born at Bethlehem, and at the same time as eternal, and as the true Ruler in Israel.

The second verse is in parenthesis. It declares the birthplace, whence He that should rule over Israel for Jehovah should go forth; and, at the same time, it reveals the eternal glory of His Person.

The consequences of Messiah's rejection

Verse 3 is connected with verse 1, and exhibits the consequences of the sin there pointed out. Israel, and more especially Judah, is given up, yet only for a season, the period of which is designated in a remarkable and instructive manner — until she which travaileth has brought forth. Israel (exercised, travailing, long preferring to stand on the footing of Hagar rather than on that of Sarah) must pass through all the afflictions, the anguish, the judgments, the chastisements of God, necessary to lead her to the acceptance of the punishment of her iniquity; being at length by His grace thoroughly convinced of the need of that grace, and of the mercy of God, and thus brought into a condition fitted to her being the vessel of the manifestation of that Son who should be born unto her — the Naomi brought back by grace, to whom (with respect to His manifestation in this world) the King is reputed to be born. Compare Isaiah 9, where the idea is developed in connection with Israel, "to us a Son is born"; and Revelation 12, where the historical fact, and its connection with Israel in the last days, are brought together.

The remnant not of Christ's body, but return to the children of Israel

Another very important element of this last scene of the present age is pointed out in this verse. Israel is given up to judgment, forsaken of God, in a certain sense, for having rejected the Christ, the Lord. But now she who travaileth has brought forth. Afterwards (and this is the element I refer to) the remnant of the brethren of this first-born Son, instead of being added to the church (Acts 2), return unto the children of Israel. The Christ is not ashamed to call them His brethren; but at this period they no longer become members of His body. Their relation is with Israel. This is the position in which they are placed before God.

The rejected One the Shepherd of Israel

He, then, who had been rejected becomes the Shepherd of Israel, and that according to the strength of Jehovah in the majesty of the name of Jehovah His God. Israel dwells in safety, for His King becomes great unto the ends of the earth. By Him the Assyrian should be overthrown, and his land laid waste by that Israel whom he had sought to overthrow.

Israel as the instrument of refreshing and the testimony of God's power

Israel in that day possesses a double character. The remnant of Jacob is the instrument of refreshing, in the precious grace that comes from God, and waits not for the laboured and varied efforts of man. They shall be as the showers upon the grass, that tarry not for man, nor wait for the sons of men. But, nevertheless, Israel is also that which rises up among the nations, as a lion among the beasts of the field, from whom none can deliver. They are the instruments and testimony of the power of God. The blessing and the strength of Jehovah is with them. The prophet declares. that all the enemies of Israel shall be cut off and perish. But Jehovah will at the same time destroy out of the midst of Israel all their false human strength, their chariots, their strong cities — all that ministers to the pride of man and leads him to trust in himself. He will destroy all their idols; Israel shall no longer worship the works of their own hands; every trace of idolatry shall be taken away. At the same time vengeance and wrath, such as had not been heard of, shall be executed upon the nations.

The first two divisions of the prophecy

This division of the prophecy ends here: the first at the close of chapter 2: Micah 4:9-13 giving, in general, the two evils with which judged Jerusalem had to do — Babylon and the gathering of the nations in the latter day, and her glorious deliverance; and Micah 5 the connection of Messiah both with the judgment and with the deliverance from the latter of these evils and the introduction of the blessing, of which the description had been given in chapter 4:1-8, as being the purpose of Jehovah. In that sense, Micah 4:8 closes the second part; but from thence to the end of chapter 5 are two appendices, so to speak, which unfold the double evil which comes on Jerusalem, and the connection of the people with their deliverers in judgment first, and then deliverance.

Chapter 6

Jehovah's controversy and pleadings with His people

Micah 6. After having thus declared the counsels of God in grace, the Spirit returns to His pleadings with Israel in respect of their moral condition, calling the whole earth as audience to hear His controversy; for Jehovah had a controversy with His people. In a touching appeal to their heart and conscience He asks what they could have against Him. He had redeemed them from Egypt, had led them by the hands of Moses, Aaron, and Miriam; He had refused to hearken to Balak and Balaam, who had done their utmost to curse Israel. If they would but consider, they would know His faithfulness. After this He lays before them, in detail, the universal wickedness that reigned among them, contrasting their ceremonies with practical righteousness: therefore also the judgment must surely fall upon them (v. 13-16). Still the man of wisdom would know it as the discipline of Jehovah, and see Jehovah's name in it — a deeply important and also precious principle. They bore the reproach of His people.

Chapter 7

Micah as the intercessor before God

In Micah 7 the prophet takes the place of intercessor before God, in the name of the people — presenting to Him at once their deep misery and their iniquities* — speaking in their name, and identifying himself with them; or, more exactly, he takes up the reproach of the city (Micah 6:9), beginning with her grief at the state she is in, but passing on, as we see often in Jeremiah, to his own distinct prophetic office, and so marking out the position of the remnant; speaking, but with the divine mind, as in the midst of the people — having their place, but judging their conduct in it — yet with all the interest attached to the love God bore them. He seeks anxiously among the people for something suitable to their title of the people of God; he finds nothing but fraud and deceit, and lying in wait for blood, that they might do evil with both hands earnestly. Still all is said in the way of the city's confession; so that out of this she can look, as bowing to God's hand — to one who will Himself plead her cause and execute judgment for her. {* This character is one of the most touching features of the prophetic office. "If," said Jeremiah, "he be a prophet, let him make intercession to Jehovah, that that which is left may not go to Babylon." "He is a prophet," said God to Abimelech, in speaking of Abraham, "and he will pray for thee." In the Psalms also it is written," There is no prophet left — none to say, How long?" — that is to say, none who knew how to reckon upon the faithfulness of Jehovah their God, and, knowing that it was only a chastisement, plead with Him for His people (compare Isaiah 6). The Spirit of God declares judgment indeed on God's part, but, because God loved the people, becomes a Spirit of intercession in the prophet for the people. With us the same thing is developed in a rather different, but more blessed and perfect manner. Intelligence of the will of God enters more into it: "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you." And all are prophets in this (1 John 5:16).}

Hatred produced by the preaching of the gospel

We find here a striking circumstance. The Lord Jesus declares in the Gospel, that that which the prophet describes, as the height of iniquity, should be produced by the preaching of the gospel. Such is the iniquity of the heart which the light brings into activity, stirring up a hatred which is only the more exasperated by the nearness of its object.

The effect produced by the Spirit of Christ

The effect on the prophet of that which he sees around him (that which the Spirit of Christ produces, where he acts in view of the all-pervading evil) was that he looked to Jehovah and waited for the God of his salvation. He takes the position pointed out as that which Jehovah could recognise. He accepts the indignation of Jehovah, until He Himself should plead the cause of His servant. In fact Jehovah would bring him forth to the light — would shew him His righteousness. The deliverance should then be complete; and she who said to Jerusalem, "Where is thy God?" (the constant cry of the unbeliever, who rejoices in the chastisement of the people of Christ, as in the sufferings of Christ Himself, mistaking these righteous dealings of a God whom he knows not) — she who rejoiced in the abasement of those whom Jehovah loved, should be trodden down as the mire of the streets (v. 7-10).

Israel re-gathered, led by Jehovah as a shepherd, and planted again in the land

From that time they should come from Egypt, from Assyria, from the seas and the mountains, to the rebuilded city; but before this the land should be desolate. Nevertheless Jehovah would lead His people as a shepherd and plant them again in their land as at first; and God would shew forth His marvellous works, as when He brought them up from Egypt; and the nations should be confounded at all the might of Israel and should be afraid before Jehovah their God.

The goodness of a pardoning God who delights in mercy and keeps His promises

The last three verses of the prophecy express the faith and the sentiments of adoration that fill the prophet's heart at the thought of the goodness of God, who pardoned the iniquities of the people and cast their sins into the depths of the sea; who delighted in mercy, and who would perform His promises to Abraham and that which He had sworn unto the fathers in days of old.

Who was a God like unto Him, who manifested Himself in His ways of grace towards His beloved people, towards the feeble remnant despised of all, but whom Jehovah in His love never forgot, in His faithfulness never forsook, in spite of all their rebellion?