



## BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Micah 4:6-8

“Encouragement by Future Greatness”

TRANSCRIPT

[Prayer] Father, we thank Thee for the privilege of the study of Thy word, and we ask again for the guidance of the Holy Spirit as we look into the Scriptures. We thank Thee for the relevance of the prophetic word, for the great principles that are found in the texts that the prophets have written. We thank Thee for their proper application to us today as we ourselves think of the spiritual things that concern us in our day. We thank Thee too for the bright hope that the prophets set before the nation Israel. And we thank Thee for the bright hope that therefore is ours as well, for we share in some of those same hopes that Israel of old encouraged themselves with. We ask that Thou would give us guidance and direction as we look again into the prophecy of Micah. And this we ask in Jesus' name and for His sake. Amen.

[Message] We're turning tonight again to the fourth chapter of the prophecy of Micah, and our subject is "Encouragement by Future Greatness." We're reading just three verses tonight, Micah chapter 4, verse 6, verse 7 and verse 8, for the study before us. So, if you have your Bibles, turn to the Old Testament and turn to the prophecy of Micah. And will you listen as we read these three verses of the fourth chapter?

Now notice that the prophecy began the fourth chapter with the words, "And it will come about in the last days." And then after the setting out of that section of the prophecy we read in verse 6,

" 'In that day,' declares the Lord, 'I will assemble the lame and gather the outcasts, even those whom I have afflicted. I will make the lame a remnant and the outcasts a strong nation, and the Lord will reign over them in Mount Zion from now on and forever. And as for you, tower of the flock, Hill of the daughter of Zion, To you it will come— Even the former dominion will come, The kingdom of the daughter of Jerusalem.' "

Encouragement by Future Greatness. As one looks out on the international scene today, the thing that impresses us is the fact that the crisis is deepening. There are perils in the south Atlantic. There are perils in the near east. Iran and Iraq are at war and have been for some time. At the heart of the turbulence is the nation Israel. Like a treed animal surrounded by howling wolves, the PLO, Jordan on the east, Egypt, Syria, and now today I heard a comment by one commentator over the radio to the effect that Iran has said that they are agreeable for war against Israel too. So we look at the situation in the east particularly, and we say, Poor little Israel with internal problems, military tensions, halting allies who don't know exactly what to do when faced with crises. In the midst of it, she seeks to have peace, but not with the one that counts. But not with the one that counts.

Perhaps you have not counted, but Israel has had five wars since 1948 when they gained their independence. That's quite a few wars. And of course the little thing that they're engaged in now might develop into number six or may be called number six by some. At any rate, Israel is anxious for peace. It's quite obvious that she lives in such a situation that she cannot tolerate constant wars. But nevertheless, peace eludes her

because the one person with whom peace may come is the one that Israel is not really seeking. Five wars since 1948 and they still have not turned to Yahweh their God.

They now have four million citizens in the land, but at the latest report I have, two thousand of them are leaving every month. On the north they have the missiles. And they are extremely anxious to get the missiles removed. But Prime Minister Begin a few months back said that they were doing everything they could to get the missiles out of the lands to the west and north of them, but he said it would take a miracle to do it, and this government does not believe in miracles. That's an interesting statement for the Prime Minister of a land or a government that is supposed to be a theocracy.

Israel is also troubled by ethnic differences within with the Ashkenazi Jews as over against the Sephardic Jews fighting. They're troubled by religious differences. They have all kinds of denominations in the midst of Judaism, but particularly differences exist between the orthodox and the less pious Israelis. They are troubled by economic problems, and again I say, the one person who might be able to help them in the midst of their difficulties they still are not willing to turn to.

In Hosea chapter 5 and verse 15 there is a most significant text which has always, it seemed to me, been something of a clue to the future of the nation Israel. The prophet Hosea writes in the last verse of the 5th chapter, giving the words of God, "I will go away and return to My place Until they acknowledge their guilt and seek My face; In their affliction they will earnestly seek Me."

So we have here what seems to be a clear statement that in the light of their departure from the truth of the word of God, God has in retributive judgment said, "I will go away. I will return to my place until they acknowledge their guilt and seek my face." And God himself, knowing the future as surely as he knows the past, has added, "in their affliction they will earnestly seek me."

That little word in the Hebrew text translated affliction here is the word that is used for the tribulation in the Old Testament. And so we really could render it something

like "in the tribulation which shall be theirs, they will earnestly seek me." In other words, the things that God brings upon the nation ultimately will reach their climax in the great tribulation and then at that time they will seek him early. But until that time there seems to be no turning away from the humanism that is predominant in the land.

However, the Old Testament Scriptures give them many, many prophecies of encouragement and comfort. And in the midst of the difficulties, the remnant down through the centuries, and there has been a remnant, a very small remnant, must have felt a great deal of encouragement from prophecies just like Micah's prophecy here, for it is a prophecy that gives us the ultimate outcome of the dealings of the Lord God with the nation Israel. Jerusalem's coming sovereignty under Yahweh is the burden of this section of the prophecy of Micah.

And then shall be given the divine answer to the enemies of Zion as we shall study in our next study the Lord willing. In verse 11 the prophet says,

"And now many nations have been assembled against you Who say, 'Let her be polluted, And let our eyes gloat over Zion.' But they do not know the thoughts of the Lord, And they do not understand His purpose; For He has gathered them like sheaves to the threshing floor. Arise and thresh, daughter of Zion, For your horn I will make iron And your hoofs I will make bronze, That you may pulverize many peoples, That you may devote to the Lord their unjust gain And their wealth to the Lord of all the earth."

And so gathered around Israel today on every side of that land are nations of enemies. I don't know the exact population now, but I saw something two or three years ago to the effect that eighty million people surrounded the four million anxious to destroy them. All prophesying, all saying, if given the opportunity, they would push them into the Mediterranean Sea and would be happy to see them drown there.

One would think that in a situation like this, when it all seems so hopeless so far as peace is concerned, that there might be a movement in that land to turn to the Lord God the God of Israel. But at the moment, there does not seem to be any turning in that land.

Well, let's look at this encouragement that Micah sought to give the people in his day. In his day, too, they were threatened. They were threatened by the Assyrians. And then a hundred years later they would be threatened by the Babylonians. And all because they have departed from the Lord God. That's really the reason for Israel's difficulties today. It is because she as a nation has departed from the covenant-keeping God.

And just as the God of the church of Jesus Christ is very much concerned over those who make up the church of Jesus Christ and promises that he will discipline his children, so he has disciplined that nation and has sent them to the four corners of the earth.

But he's also prophesied that that nation as a nation shall be brought back into the land. Many shall be lost along the way because today when an Israelite doesn't believe in the Lord, he's just like a Gentile. But they have the national promises, the promise of a national restoration. And God is working all of the affairs on this earth toward that end.

Now you can easily see that the prophets who spoke of the divine purpose and of its sure accomplishment were those who believed in the sovereignty of God over the affairs of men. And they believed that the God of heaven was not only one who was able to control the thoughts and actions of men but that he was doing just that in order that his purpose might be accomplished.

When one looks at the prophetic word, you wonder how any one could help but believe in the sovereignty of God and of his control over all of the circumstances of life. The Apostle Paul who was a good believing Jew said that God works all things according to the counsel of his own will. And that is surely the belief of the prophets of Israel.

Now in this section that we're looking at, there are just two stanzas in the prophecy. Each one of them is of three lines each. The first composes verses 6 and 7, and then the second, verse 8.

You notice the ideas that are prominent in these three little verses. There is the idea of a shepherd and the sheep. There is the idea of kingship because the shepherds of the east shaded into the kings, and the kings were ideally considered to be shepherds because they were kings who cared for the people. And then there is the theme of Jerusalem which is prominent.

And the purpose of these three verses is to give Israel encouragement in the dark days of the Assyrian invasion of the land. And for the weakness that they were experiencing, he promises a strength to come. And for the humiliation which they are undergoing as the people of God, he promises an ultimate divine glory.

Now you'll notice that there is also a close connection between this section and the preceding one, for the preceding five verse of chapter 4 ended on the note of the prophets' exclamation, "Though all the peoples walk Each in the name of his god, As for us, we will walk In the name of the Lord our God forever and ever."

Now the permanence of the rule of God answers to this claim of permanent fidelity. They say, "As for us, we will walk In the name of the Lord our God forever and ever." And so in the 7th verse, the prophet giving the words of the Lord says, "And the Lord will reign over them in Mount Zion From now on and forever." So the permanence of his rule over Jerusalem answers to the permanent fidelity expressed by the prophet in verse 5. Now these things are to be taken together.

But if there are two things that he speaks about, two stanzas in the prophecy, I would sum them up this way, that in verses 6 and 7 he speaks about the restoration of the people. And then in verse 8 he speaks about the restoration of the city, the city of Jerusalem.

Remember that the prophet was prophesying in a time of a divided kingdom. And he was prophesying in the south. And while he had in mind not only Judah, but also Israel, he was primarily a prophet to the southern kingdom of Judah.

Now the restoration of the people is referred to in verses 6 and 7. And we read in the very first statement, " 'In that day,' declares the Lord." Now these words, the six of them in the English text that I've just read are a kind of introduction and then follow the two stanzas of the prophecy.

He says, "In that day." Now we might ask the question, What day is he speaking about? Well fortunately, in this chapter he has already begun the prophecies of chapter 4 by saying, "And it will come about in the last days." And we pointed out in our last study that that expression, "In the last days," is an expression that ordinarily in the Old Testament refers to the Messianic days; 'achariyth yowm is a statement that almost always refers to the days of the Messiah. And if you put all of the passages together in which that phrase occurs, you will see that the characteristic times or the characteristic features of the last times are the great tribulation period coming to a climax in the Second Advent of the Messiah to the earth to execute judgment and to establish his kingdom upon the earth.

So that's the time that the prophet is speaking about ultimately. There may be many little times between that time and the great time. There may be times in which there is partial restoration. But ultimately there is to be worldwide dispersion and one final great restoration at the conclusion of the tribulation period. "In that day," then. So this is, I think, Messianic days, a reference to the Second Advent of the Lord Jesus Christ ultimately.

He speaks of the activity that follows. He says, "I will assemble the lame And gather the outcasts, Even those whom I have afflicted."

Now one might ask when he reads that there's going to be a great return of power to the nation Israel, if God is going to do a great work of restoring the people, how is he

going to accomplish this? Is this just a magnificent dream that is to encourage people but is not really to be taken as a realistic future prophecy on the part of God that is to be fulfilled? Is it just something that we are to encourage ourselves with as a kind of silent hope?

There are people who think of the prophetic word in that way. They rather think of the prophetic word as not really realistic at all. We're not to take these texts at their normal meaning. We're just to get some kind of feeling of encouragement from reading them, very much like some people read the Psalms. They read the Psalms in order to encourage themselves but really sometimes they do not read them as if they are really promises that God stands behind, but just something to stir them up psychologically.

That's a very common way of reading the Psalms by liberal theologians. They encourage us to read them in that way, that they will do us some psychological good to read all of the promises. Is that what we are to think about when we read, "In that day," declares the Lord, "I will assemble the lame And gather the outcasts, whom I have afflicted."?

Well, I think not. In the first place, he says, " 'In that day,' declares the Lord." Now that expression also, which we've had before in Micah, really means something like the oracle of Yahweh. It's something behind which the God of this universe stands and particularly the covenant-keeping God of Israel. So whatever he says is going to come to pass because God is the one who stands behind it. So this is not simply a dream. This is something that the God of Israel stands behind. "In that day, I will assemble the lame and gather the outcasts."

Now the word that is translated here assemble is a word that was frequently used of shepherds assembling or gathering their sheep. But also, the term that is used for the lame here is rather significant too. It is really a noun, and it is a personification of Judah as a flock because they are looked at as lame. So we have a metaphor of a shepherd and a flock and lame people or outcasts. And it is these, one of the commentators translates

the second outcasts, which is a different Hebrew word, by the expression strays. So the picture is of a shepherd who is going to gather the lame and the strays together.

Now, this shows the trail that they must traverse in order to their ultimate glory. In other words, if they read this thing carefully, they probably would have gained some inkling in Micah's day that it's not going to be in the immediate future, because there's going to be a period of time when they're going to be sent out. And they will be strays, they will be outcasts, they will be lame. And it's when they are in that state that they are going to be returned. In other words, they must traverse this path on to the glory that is in the future. So, what shines forth then is some indication of the fact that their future is not altogether good.

The word lame is a very interesting word because it occurs in the Old Testament just three times. It occurs in the Book of Zephaniah, I should say, in chapter 3 verse 19. And it occurs in Genesis chapter 32 in verse 21.

Now if you remember Genesis 32, that's the chapter in which Jacob wrestles with the angel. And remember, he discovers that the angel, instead of being a representative of Esau with whom he was afraid to meet, turns out to be the Lord God himself.

We read in verse 24 of chapter 32 of Genesis, "Then Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him until daybreak." And then the account follows, "And when he saw that he had not prevailed against him, he touched the socket of his thigh; (this man, when he saw that Jacob was wrestling with him, he touched the socket of Jacob's thigh) so the socket of Jacob's thigh was dislocated while he wrestled with him."

You see, they wrestled for a considerable period of time and daybreak was coming. And the Old Testament said that a man could not look upon the face of God and live. And so since daybreak was coming, this person with this tremendous power, all that he had to do was just put his finger on Jacob's thigh and it was dislocated.

"And he said, 'Let me go, for the day is breaking.' But Jacob said, 'I will not let you go unless you bless me.' And he said to him, 'What is your name?' And he said, 'Jacob.' And he said, 'Your name shall no longer be Jacob, but Israel; for you have striven with God and with me and have prevailed.' Then Jacob asked him and said, 'Please tell me your name.' But he said, 'Why is it that you ask my name?' And he blessed him there. So Jacob named the place Peniel, for he said, 'I have seen God face to face, yet my life has been preserved.'

And so the person that he saw was the Lord Jesus Christ in a theophany. But we read in verse 31, "Now the sun rose upon him just as he crossed over Penuel, and he was limping on his thigh." That's the word "he was lame on his thigh".

So, here in Micah chapter 4 and verse 6, when he says "I will assemble the lame," it's almost as if he is saying: I will assemble the Jacobs, my Jacobs who have finally come to understand something about the greatness of the God of Jacob. So the God who has demonstrated his power to break and mar has also, or will also demonstrate his power to mend and to make anew, one of the commentators said.

This word, the next word that is translated outcasts, the one in verse 6 when he says "I will assemble the lame and gather the outcasts," is a word that was particularly used of the dispersed in the exile. Now I think that is very interesting, because up to this point the exile has not taken place. And yet here it is said by God, "I am going, in that day, to assemble the lame and gather the outcasts," the word used of those who are in dispersion.

Look back at Deuteronomy chapter 30 and verse 4. Deuteronomy chapter 30 and verse 4 reads like this, I'll read verse 1 down through verse 4,

"So it shall become when all of these things have come upon you, the blessing and the curse which I have set before you, and you call them to mind in all nations where the

Lord your God has banished you, (Notice that, in the nations where the Lord God has banished you. So Moses is warning that the time is coming when Israel's going to be banished to the nations. Now of course this is a long time in the future) and you return to the Lord your God and obey Him with all your heart and soul according to all that I command you today, you and your sons, then the Lord God will restore you from captivity, and have compassion on you, and will gather you again from all the peoples where the Lord your God has scattered you. If your outcasts are at the ends of the earth, from there the Lord your God will gather you, and from there He will bring you back."

Now that is the same term that is used here in Micah chapter 4 and verse 6. In that day, declares the Lord, I'm going to gather all the Jacobs, all the lame Jacobs. And I'm going to gather the banished, those who've been scattered to the four corners of the earth, even those whom I have afflicted. And that word afflicted is the same root as the word that says in their tribulation they will call upon me early. So, here is a prophecy of a future re-gathering of the nation Israel. But implied in it is a scattering to the four corners of the earth that has not taken place at this time. But it is implicit in the prophecy that Micah here has set forth.

He goes on to say, "I will make the lame a remnant And the outcasts." And this term is a slightly different term from the outcasts. It means those who are over yonder, in other words, those who are at the four corners of the earth. "And the outcasts, I'm going to make strong nation."

Now, I think that's rather interesting. So from removed far off, they're going to be brought back, and they're going to be made a strong nation. In other words, they're going to be a power to be reckoned with among the nations of the earth.

Now the prophets, of course, do not give us all of the time schedule of things. They didn't really know the time schedule of things. That is unfolded in the New Testament. And we learn from the New Testament there is a lengthy period of time in

which we are living between the first and second comings of the Lord Jesus Christ and the fulfillment of these prophecies. But Israel is given here the assurance that they are one day going to be a strong nation.

They are not yet that strong nation. In spite of the fact that, as far as I'm concerned, I'd like to have the Israelis train the United States army. I think they'd be a whole lot better. And also, I wouldn't like to fight them. I noticed this afternoon that when some of the Syrians, I believe, or the PLO, I believe, fired on the Israelis from some embattlements on the land, the Israeli airplanes decided that they would do a little bombing of them when they exposed themselves. And the news commentator over channel four said they bombed with devastating accuracy. I rather like that. I think we need some of them to train our men.

But at any rate, the day is coming when they're going to be a strong nation. They're going to be a nation to reckon with, to be reckoned with. And even at the present time, they're a nation to be reckoned with in the east. And those nations sitting around them, eighty million strong, isn't it interesting how Israel has managed to survive in the midst of eighty million people who hate them with a fury that is born of the lake of fire? It's amazing. But that is nothing like what they shall be in the future, for in the future they shall be the head of the nations.

Gentiles sometimes don't like that. But then, Gentiles sometimes don't like the doctrine of a sovereign God either. And we must remember that God has his purposes and he is accomplishing them. The reason we hate those things is given right here in verse 12, "But they do not know the thoughts of the Lord, And they do not understand His purpose."

Well, the result is given in the last part of verse 7 as he speaks about the restoration of the people. He said, "And the Lord (that is Yahweh) will reign over them in Mount Zion From now on and forever."

I think it's interesting that the idea of a shepherd who's gathering the flock, for the lame and the outcasts are really just figurative ways of referring to a flock. "I will assemble the lame, I will gather the outcasts." Here the idea of the divine shepherd gathering his sheep shades off into the sovereign Lord of the people because shepherding is the ancient expression, the figurative expression, of ruling. For example, in Psalm 2 we read concerning the Messiah, he will shepherd his sheep with "a rod of iron." That means he will rule them with a rod of iron. And so Yahweh is going to gather his sheep and he's going to shepherd "them in Mount Zion from now on and forever."

Human kings are only viceroys in Israel. Human kings are only viceroys on the earth. In the future Yahweh will reign himself from his restored temple.

I think it's very striking too that the temple was by the side of the palace in Jerusalem linking the spiritual side with the aspects of the sovereignty of the king. And the king was the representative of the Lord God and ruled by the side of the temple where the priests served. And in that temple was the symbol of the presence of God in the Ark of the Covenant. So in the future, Yahweh is going to reign himself from his restored temple.

Now in verse 8, he speaks of the restoration of the city. He said, "And as for you, tower of the flock, Hill of the daughter of Zion." The shepherd motif which has been the theme of verses 6 and 7 is skillfully woven into the thought of Jerusalem as the seat of royalty, as a watch tower for the ruler. If you've been to city of Jerusalem, and you know something about those hills around there, you can picture, no doubt, the watch tower in ancient times in which the shepherds went in order to observe their flocks out on the hills. And as they looked out on those hills round about the city, they were looking, of course, for the rustlers or the marauders and the beasts who would attack the flock. Well that's the figure that is here. And Jerusalem is looked at as the tower of the flock.

"And as for you, tower of the flock." By the way, there was a tower called migedal eder and that's the exact Hebrew expression that is used here which means the

tower of the flock, but it also was named that, too; that was the name of the place. It was one mile from Bethlehem and it was the watch tower for the shepherds. And they would go up in the tower in order to keep watch over their flocks.

And so Jerusalem is going to be the "watch tower of the flock, the hill of the daughter of Zion." So it's going to be as proud in the future as it was in the days of David and Soloman when they had a vast empire and in a sense in their day controlled their destiny to a great degree.

And finally, in the last part of the 8th verse we read, "To you it will come— Even the former dominion will come, The kingdom of the daughter of Jerusalem." So Jerusalem is going to be a proud realm fit for the King of Kings.

Now one notices here, incidentally, that the prophet uses the expression "Even the former dominion will come." Now when he says "former dominion" he refers back, of course, to the time before the division of the kingdom into the northern and southern kingdom. So this is a prophecy of the restoration of a united kingdom. So, even the former dominion is going to come, the kingdom of the daughter of Jerusalem.

Well, I don't know what assurance this was to Israel in the day of the prophet Micah. If they had responded in faith to the things that the prophet had said, a great deal of the problems that they had with Assyria and then with Babylon, for even in this prophecy, something that is to happen a hundred years later is prophesied. We read in verse 10, "Writhe and labor to give birth, Daughter of Zion, Like a woman in childbirth; For now you will go out of the city, Dwell in the field, And go to Babylon." Remarkable prophecy a hundred years before it took place, but the prophet names the place to which they will go in captivity. It's obvious that they did not respond to the fulness of the message because a hundred years later they went into captivity.

A remnant returned and then the Lord Jesus came. And Israel did not again respond to the call to repent for the kingdom of the heavens is at hand, finally crucifying their Messiah. And it was necessary for the Lord God to execute the final stage in the

discipline of the nation. He sent them, after the destruction of Jerusalem, to the four corners of the earth to which they have gone and are to this present day.

There is a movement, of course, of the nation back into the land. Remarkable things are transpiring, but fundamentally Israel still does not seek the one who holds the clue to her destiny, the one who is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, the Yahweh who gives this prophecy through the prophet Micah. Oh, if they should only seek him, their deliverance should come.

Last week I mentioned that the psalmist in Psalm 122 and verse 6 says, "Pray for the peace of Jerusalem. May they prosper who love you." That is a call for prayer that all evangelical Christians should respond to as well, for what it essentially means when we pray for the peace of Jerusalem is the same thing that the Lord Jesus set before us as a model prayer, "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." May God give us an incentive to pray for the peace of Jerusalem that his purpose and his program may reach its tremendous climax in the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Let's close in a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we thank Thee and praise Thee for these wonderful prophecies given by the prophet Micah to Israel of old. And as we think Lord about the impervious response to the word of God that was given in Micah's day, Lord, we ask that Thou wilt deliver us from the indifference and hardness of heart that characterized that generation. Lord, we recognize that we are no different from others who are made of flesh such as we are. And that it is just as possible for us to be indifferent, unresponsive, cold to the word of God, actually rebellious against it, as they were. We know too that judgment begins at the house of God. Thou dost discipline those who are in relationship with Thee and judge those whose profession is not real at all.

And so Lord, we pray that Thou wilt warm our hearts through the word of God. Give us a tremendous desire to seek Thy face, confessing our sin, our coldness, our

indifference. And then, Lord, transform us and use us for Thy glory. Deliver us from the necessity of discipline and judgment. And for everyone present in this auditorium, oh God, speak to them and their own particular needs and desires. May we bring the affairs of our life under the eyes of our great sovereign God, the Yahweh of Israel, the Lord Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. May his name be exalted and glorified. For Jesus' sake. Amen.