

The World's Future

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[0 : 00] We're going to read the whole of that passage from 1 to 5, and we're going to look at it very briefly.

It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and it shall be lifted up above the hills, and people shall flow to it, and many nations shall come and say, Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us his ways, and that we may walk in his paths.

For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. He shall judge between many peoples, and shall decide for strong nations afar off.

And they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks. Nations shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.

But they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree, and no one shall make them afraid. For the mouth of the Lord of hosts has spoken. For all the people walk each in the name of its God, but we will walk in the name of the Lord our God forever and ever.

[1 : 18] Amen. There were several things that God wanted to say to his people Judah through the prophet Micah.

Micah lived round about 700 BC, round about the same time as Isaiah. And we know that partly because this prophecy in chapter 4 is almost identical to Isaiah chapter 2, verse 1 to 5.

And the king, we don't know exactly who the king was at the time these words were spoken. But we can make an educated guess that it was one of the kings that was mentioned at the very beginning of the prophecy.

It was either Jotham, Ahaz, or Hezekiah, kings of Judah. And this was the word of God to the people of Judah who were connected to God by covenant.

God was their God, and they were his people. And yet, they were terribly, terribly wrong in their life and in their lifestyle. So the first thing that God wanted to say to his people through the prophet was, You are wrong.

[2 : 30] You are out of step with me. Your life is far from what it should be. And you need to become right with me as your God.

And that's, of course, what a prophet was. A lot of people think that a prophet was only concerned with telling the future. Well, of course, that was part of it. But for the most part, a prophet's job was simply to tell the people what kind of lives they were living in relation to God and his law.

And, of course, that made a prophet quite an unpopular person and a lonely person. It was not an easy job to be a prophet, particularly when you had to say some very unpleasant and uncomfortable things to the people of God, especially when they thought they were doing just fine.

Life for them was quite prosperous and comfortable. And for them, their future was secure. There were wars, of course, but they were confident in themselves.

And they were actually, there was a strange sense in which they were confident in God. They believed that because their forefathers loved and served God, and because God had made promises to them as the people of Judah, that they were safe.

[3 : 45] Jerusalem would never be destroyed. The temple would always be there because God had promised that this would be so to David. How wrong they were.

They were completely wrong. They made that as an excuse to live any way that they wanted. And their lives were far from what they should have been.

There was corruption. There was lies. There were people. Some of them were on the take, as we would say. The priests, if you read in Micah chapter 3, its heads give judgment for a bribe.

The judges were on the take. It depended on how much money you had, how much you were prepared to give to the judge. And if you were prepared to give a certain sum to the judge, he was prepared to set you free from anything you were accused of.

That's not justice. And God was seriously displeased with his people. It was the same with the poor. They were being oppressed and taken advantage of. Their workers were working in the field, and their employers were not giving them their due reward or their wages.

[4 : 56] And yet they would lean on the Lord and say, is not the Lord in the midst of us? No disaster shall come upon us. Verse 11. God was rightly angry.

You can't fault God for being angry with his people on this occasion. We would all agree that injustice is a terrible thing, that oppression and poverty, where poverty is deliberately placed on a people, where the rich get richer and the poor become poor at the hands and because of the cruelty of the rich.

Everyone would agree with that. But what we might not agree with in the 21st enlightened century is these things are wrong because God says they're wrong.

If you're going to deny that, then I ask you, how do you know that they're wrong? What makes it wrong for me, if I'm successful and rich, to become even richer at the expense of someone who's poor?

What makes it wrong for me to take advantage of anyone I want to take advantage of if I happen to be in that position? If there's no God, then it's not wrong at all.

[6 : 06] And that's the awful thing about unbelief. If you take God out of the picture, you're taking morality, everything that we're agreed upon as a world.

Injustice, lies, cruelty, violence, all of these things, we all agree that they're wrong. But it's God that says that they're wrong. They're wrong because God has made them wrong.

And if you are going to listen to God in one respect, you have to listen to God in every respect, including the areas of your life where you are going wrong.

God's no, he's no respecter of persons. Wrong is wrong. Sin is sin. Corruption is corruption. Immorality is immorality.

Whatever it takes place. And if you're going to listen to God tonight, you have to take a look at your own life. You have to ask yourself, where do I stand in relation to what God thinks of the world?

[7 : 06] Because I'm part of this world. I'm part of a fallen world. I can't pick and choose what sins and what wrongdoing is important and what's not just because it happens to be unpopular with the masses.

But I have to listen to everything that God is saying. These people were picking and choosing what they wanted to be wrong. And God is saying to them, you are in a very dangerous place because if you continue to do this, you continue to be corrupt and tell lies.

And if your society continues as it is, then you will bring punishment on yourself. And of course, the whole thing arose out of their idolatry.

They had put God to one side. They had turned their back on the voice of God. And as soon as you do that, then who knows what you are capable of?

I don't know what I would be capable of if I turned my back on the voice of God. I'd be capable of anything. And so would you this evening. We're all capable. You think of the most horrendous things we hear and see in the newspapers and in the news.

[8 : 14] And we're all capable of the same thing. These people had turned their back. They were bowing down, Isaiah tells us, to the work of their own hands. Now, of course, in those days, what that meant was that they would fashion idols for themselves.

And they would bow down to these idols in order for them to have successful crops and for them to have a good harvest at the end of the year. Because that was what the fashionable thing to do.

They were bowing down to the work of their own hands. And that is always what idolatry is. It's when we bow down and serve the created rather than the creator.

We may not do that nowadays. But we still bow down to the work of our own hands. That's why our world is obsessed with our technology and our achievements and our successes in a modern scientific world.

We think we've made it. We think we have dispensed with the need of God. And what we need to do is improve our technology and improve our advancement. We've left behind the need of God.

[9 : 25] We have bowed down to the work of our own hands. And so, in many senses, that's what makes the book of Micah or the book of Isaiah so relevant for today's world.

We may not exactly replicate the wrongdoing of Israel and Judah. And yet, we recognize ourselves in when God criticizes his people.

And that's why we need this evening to listen to the voice of God. That's the first thing that God was telling his people. How wrong they were. I want you honestly tonight to ask, Where do I stand in relation to the voice of God?

When I measure my life honestly, You don't need to get anyone else to help you with this. You don't need anyone else to help you with. All you need is an honest heart.

To ask yourself, When I measure my own life against what God commands me to be in the Bible, Where do I stand? How close is my life? And if we're truly honest this evening, We will have to confess that we're nowhere near where we ought to be.

[10 : 35] That's the great problem with that. That's the heart of the problem of mankind, humankind this evening. And you are included in that. And so am I.

So that's what the first thing that he was telling his people, That he was not pleased with them. He did so not because he took any pleasure in condemning his people. He did so because he wanted them to repent and to turn away, So that they could live a life of peace and contentment.

But he knew at the same time, That the heart of man, as the Bible tells us, Is corrupt and it's wicked, Because we love darkness rather than light. Even when Jesus came into the world, We're told light has come into the world, And men love darkness rather than, The reason that Jesus' contemporaries refused to believe in him Was not because he gave no evidence that he was the Son of God.

He gave abundant evidence that he was this. He still does. The reason that people choose not to believe in Jesus Is because they don't want to believe in Jesus.

Because of what he demands of us. He demands our lives, our all. When a person becomes a Christian, He surrenders everything to the Lord Jesus Christ.

[11 : 55] And I would be lying this evening if I was to water that down in any way. The demand of the gospel is, If anyone will come after me, He must deny himself, And take up his cross daily, And follow me.

That's what God says to each one of us. And God knew that in those days, As he spoke to Israel through the prophet, That they would not listen. He knew that he would have to take things a stage further, And allow the enemies of Judah To come and surround Jerusalem, To destroy it, To destroy the temple, And to remove most of its inhabitants, And to take them as captives to Babylon.

That was the warning. Even when God plainly warned the people Against what they were doing, They refused to listen. But the second thing that God tells his people, Is that that's not the end of the story.

Even although they would be punished for their sin, A time would come, When they would return to Jerusalem, And when they would be reconstituted, If you like, As the people of Israel.

Jerusalem would be built up again, And the temple would be built, And that's exactly what happened. One of the most astonishing prophecies In the Old Testament is this. God said, You'll be in Babylon, The people of Israel will be taken to Babylon For 70 years.

[13 : 24] Sure enough, Nebuchadnezzar came, Removed the people of Israel From the people of Judah, They went to Babylon. 70 years later, According exactly to the promise That God had made, Cyrus, Who became king at that time, King of Persia, He allowed the people to go home.

It's one of the most astonishing prophecies. How did the prophet know That they were only going to be in Babylon For 70 years, Held captive, And then, Because God told him.

It's the word of God, The word of promise. But here's the third thing, And I want us to look at this evening, Just very, very briefly. The third thing that God tells his people Is that the long-term future Is a glorious one.

Even although the people were wrong In their lives and their lifestyle, That God still had a glorious future For Israel, And indeed for the world.

Because I believe that these verses, In chapter 4, Verse 1 to 5, They don't refer to The literal Jerusalem, The geographic city, Either as it was then, Or even as it is now.

[14 : 38] But I believe that these words, They refer to The gospel, And what the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ Was going to accomplish In the world.

I want us to look at the vision, First of all, In which God promises That, Verse 1, The mountain of the house of the Lord Shall be established As the highest of the mountains.

Let's not get too wrapped up In what this means at the moment. Let's just stop for a moment And imagine what is happening here. Here is a mountain, And everyone knew that The people of Jerusalem Knew especially what mountains were Because all they had to do Was look out, They saw mountains all around them.

If you've ever been to Jerusalem, You will know that it is It is on a series of hills. It's on a mountainous area. It's not like the Alps Or the Himalayas. They're not mega high, But they're reasonably high, But they're on a mountainous, It's a hilly area.

And Jerusalem is situated Not on the highest mountain. There were other mountains Round about Jerusalem That were actually higher, And that are higher Than the mountain on which Jerusalem.

[15 : 55] But here, It's like God is saying, Imagine in your mind's eye That here is the mountain Of the house of the Lord. There's no question As to what that means.

That means the mountain On which Jerusalem, Which was the house of the Lord, Stood. But a day will come, Says God, When first of all, Can you imagine this mountain Rising up from the ground And becoming higher Than all the other mountains?

That's the first thing He asks the people to imagine. It shall come in the latter days That the mountain Of the house of the Lord Shall be established As the highest of the mountains. So there's a kind of vision, It's a kind of dramatic Presentation being placed In front of the people That this mountain Is going to rise up From the earth, From where it was, And it was going to become higher Than all the mountains Around it.

And on top of that mountain Was the city of God And particularly the temple of God The place where God Was worshipped And where God Was present.

That's the first thing. Look on with me And peoples Shall flow to it. Now we're not talking about One or two Or ten Or twenty Or We're talking about Massive A massive Number Of people.

[17 : 24] This mountain On which The city And the temple Of God Is Is the most Is the most Populated Place On earth.

Peoples Shall flow To it. How can Any river Flow? The word here Is the same word As you would use For a river Flowing. You know That it's impossible For a river To flow upwards.

But when the people Come to this mountain They're going to flow Up to the mountain. And then verse 2 He goes on to say These people Are going to come Not just from The surrounding areas They're not going to Just be from Bethlehem Or from Or from Bethel Or any of these Surrounding cities.

They're going to become They're going to come from Every nation Of the world. Many nations Will come. So they're coming From overseas. They're coming from Europe.

They're coming from Asia. They're coming from Australia. They're coming from The Far East. From Thailand And China And Japan. They're coming from America. From South America.

[18 : 30] From You name it. Alaska. From the furthest Corners of the world. I know that there's No corners in the world. I'm just speaking Figuratively.

From the furthest Places in the earth. All these people Are going to Teem To this mountain That has been Raised and elevated Higher than any Other mountain.

Can you imagine this? And all the time I hope you're asking Well what's this What does this mean? Remember this is The word of God. He doesn't say These things just for Effect Or just to use Fancy language.

God is telling The people something. And he's telling Us something This evening. All these people In the world From tribe From different tribes And languages And cultures And color They're all coming To this one place And they're flowing To it in great Number.

Let's read on. They're not going To the mountain Because they're being Forced into it. It's not like The people who Were carried Captive by Nebuchadnezzar In due time When he surrounded Jerusalem And he forced People to leave Jerusalem He chained them And he dragged Them off in their Hundreds and their Thousands to Babylon To be his subjects.

[19 : 56] That's one way Of getting a lot Of people into A certain place. You can force them Into it at gunpoint. But these people Are coming because They want to be there.

They've decided To be there. It's the place Where they want To be more than Anything else. There's a longing In their heart. They know that Jerusalem is the Greatest, the best Place in the world For them.

Look at this. They're saying to One another, Come, let us go up To the mountain Of the Lord, To the house Of the God Of Jacob. Why do they So want to be there?

He tells us That he, God, May teach us His ways And that we may Walk in his paths. Can you imagine That?

That's the picture. It's this glorious Picture, isn't it? What does it mean? Here we have The mountain Of the house Of the Lord, The place Where the temple Of God is And it's rising up Above every other Hill and we have People milling, Flowing, Flooding Into this place From every nation Of the world And they're there Because they want To be there.

[21 : 20] They're there Because they want To hear God Speaking to them. More than anything Else. What does this mean?

First of all, It was a prophecy That extended Beyond the people Of Judah Because it's about Not just them, It's about people From all over The world. The question is, When is this Going to be?

And what does This prophecy mean? Well, the answer To the first question Lies in what Verse 1 means.

Look at verse 1. It shall come to pass In the latter days. In the latter days. Now, this phrase Can mean one of two things.

And not everyone Is agreed as to What it means. This is where There is some complication As we saw When we went through All the way through The book of Revelation. Not everyone agrees With one another On what these things mean.

[22 : 25] I find it intriguing. It could mean, As some people Would point out, As some people Would maintain, That it is the days Immediately Before the coming, The second coming Of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Whenever that will be. The days in which we live Right now.

Since the first coming Of Jesus All the way to the second coming Of Jesus Whenever that will be. And we don't have time We don't have time. The clock is going Very quickly.

I'm not going to go Into all the arguments As to what the latter days Might mean. I'm just going to Simply put that before you And ask you to go If you're interested And to have a look At the phrase yourself As to what it might mean.

But I believe It means the gospel era. The time between The first coming of Jesus His death on the cross And the resurrection And the second coming Of Jesus.

[23 : 36] But that still leaves us With a question. Does this mean That the number of people Who are coming to Jerusalem Is that a cumulative Number of people That is being foreseen By the prophet The total number of people Who will be converted Between the first coming Of Jesus and the second coming Or Will the gospel Take hold of the world As it is preached And spread All over the world Tonight?

Will a day come When people will be converted Not just in tens And hundreds And thousands But en masse Where the power Of the gospel Will be such That the whole world As it were Not everyone Not every single person But all across the world Will recognize And bow down And honor God As the Lord I want to put that Before you As I've done before Controversially I know that not everyone Agrees with this But let me once again Ask you this What does the Lord's prayer What does the Lord's prayer mean When he says Thy kingdom come Thy will be done On earth As it is In heaven Do we believe tonight In the power of the gospel To take hold Of the lives Of men and women How we When we look back At the past And we see

That even already In a fallen In a world That has Known so much Violence And destruction Over the last Two thousand years Yet Is there any Influence On this earth That is comparable To the influence Of the gospel Over the last Two thousand years Is there I would say not There are more Christians in the world Today Than there ever Have been in the past Don't tell me That God is not Building up his kingdom Don't tell me That Jesus is not Fulfilling his promise On this rock I will build my church And the gates of hell Will not prevail Against it I would put it to you Is this not an Old testament prophecy Of exactly the same thing Can you imagine A world where Instead of milling To football matches As these are the Popular places of The world today Because I'm not saying that I'm not declaring

That to be right Or wrong But I'm just saying These are where People crowd round Crowd into Cinemas Festivals The Olympics People coming from All over the world Can you imagine And we're not talking About a literal Jerusalem here We're not saying That this prophecy Is going to come To pass Geographically Where people Will one day Come from all over The world Literally on planes And in cars And on trains And they'll come To Israel And they'll go To do There isn't enough Room for all These people But if you remember That this is the Mountain of the House of the Lord It is the gospel Could this be God's way Of looking into The future And announcing To his people And announcing To us That millions Of people Will come To Jesus From all over The world The success

Of the gospel Why else Would Jesus Have said To his disciples Go into All the world And make Disciples Of all nations Baptizing them In the name Of the Father The Son And the Holy Spirit And teaching Them To observe Everything That I have Commanded To you So Whether this Is a cumulative Effect Even if it is It's glorious We don't know Right now How many people Are hearing the gospel Can you imagine Right now We always tend To listen To the media And the media Will tell us That Christianity Is out of date It's for the past We live in a Such an advanced World That the Christian Faith is No longer Has any relevance Well that's What they tell us Here But you know What's happening In other places In the world And people are Listening to the gospel In great numbers Churches are full Packed out Listening to And they're there Because they want To praise God And because they Want to listen

[28 : 13] To the Bible They can't get Enough of it I've seen it For myself People in different Parts of the world And they'll They'll spend Two Three hours In a service Listening to God's word And praising Him because Of the joy That's in their Heart Of having met With Jesus As their saviour That's what's Happening in Various parts Of the world We pray tonight That one day It will happen Again here In this country That God Will break The hardness Of the secularist Heart In Scotland And in England And Ireland And Wales And Europe We pray God can do It But very Often Christians They begin To retreat Into Themselves They conclude That we're Finished God's no Longer Any purpose It's already

Well saying What's happening In other Countries Of the world But we're Finished He's given Up on us Has he Who told you That God could In a moment Of time In his own Mercy And power He could Pour out His spirit And passages Like this They remind Us of The influence And the power Of the gospel They reaffirm To us That when All the other Powers and Empires and Forces When everything Else which Influences people In our generation It's all going To go It's all going To disappear But God Will remain Heaven and Earth will Pass away Said Jesus But my words Will never Pass away If you want To be part Of a guaranteed Movement Tonight Then you come To Jesus It's the only Certainty that we Have in this Life Have you ever Asked yourself What is the Future for this World You can answer

That in so Many different Ways If you're a Technological Genius You could say Like I've said Before Well look at The changes That have Taken place In this world Over the last 50 years When I was Growing up Computers Were for Big companies And for Governments And for The tax Office They filled A room They would Fill a room As big As this And now Everyone Or most People anyway Has got One on His table On his Desk When I was Growing up Every phone Was connected To the To the Phone network The idea Of having a Mobile phone Was just Unthinkable I never Would have Said That I Would ever See the Day When everybody Would have Their mobile Phone Yet they Do When space Travel I remember 1969 Neil Armstrong Died last week First man to Step on the Moon I remember It really Well I remember Watching it On the TV Black and White TV We've Done it We've Conquered Something that

We'd never Conquered before Of course You could Say well There's a Glorious Future Ahead of Us And it's All to Do with Man's Achievement You could Put your Faith In Technology And you Could say Isn't it Exciting How things Are advancing In terms of Communication And medical Skills And travel We're no More We know More about Diseases Than we Ever did And you Could choose I suppose Tonight To put Your faith In man's Achievement Humankind's Achievement But then There's another Side to the Story as Well isn't There We're in Financial Chaos We don't Know What the End of The Current Crisis In the Eurozone Could bring I'm not Trying to Scare Monger It could Be okay We could Be It could Turn the Corner Next year Or whatever As people Are saying Sure But has It not Brought

That sense Of Uncertainty Into your Own mind Where we Know that Despite Our advancement And our Achievement And our Success We stand Tonight In a Double Dip Recession And we Don't Know whether The future Means prosperity Or poverty For every One of us We don't Know Because we Live in An uncertain World And then The human Heart Doesn't Change I don't Suppose There's Many of Us This evening That That remembers The second World War This week I attended The funeral I conducted The funeral Of a man Who had Been a Prisoner Of war In Germany I began To think Of how How we've Lost sight Younger Generation Including Myself We've lost Sight Of what These men And women Went through What they Saw The horrors Of what They saw And the Problem with That is That if you Live in a Generation that Has never Seen war Then you

[33 : 17] Begin to Think that It only Happens in Other cultures And other Countries like Iraq and Afghanistan It's never Going to Happen here But it Could because It did And if it Can happen It may Very well Do The human Heart Has not Changed In the 60 70 80 years Since there Was conflict The last Time Some of Us grew Up like Myself In the Cold War And where We didn't Know Who was Going to Press the Button Whether it Was going To be The USSR At some Point There Was the Cuban Missile Crisis And I Grew up With a Constant Cloud Of what Could Happen Of course That appears To have Eased off At the Moment But it Shows us What That the World's Future Is far From Certain entropy Treated To do What Is the wicked mission Assassin Mission

Ass Sea might bring for us? Are you quite happy to take that chance, believing that the best person to determine your future is yourself and in what you can achieve? Or are you going to listen, perhaps for the first time in your life, to God's guaranteed future, which is only found in God's Son, who came into the world in order to reconcile us and to bring us to be right with God by taking away our sin on the cross? And only through Him and through His death as the sacrifice for our sin, His resurrection from the dead, can we know that certainty so that whatever happens to this world, that God has a certain future. And the world, one day we're told, will come to an end as we know it. That's promised to us. So everything that we have done, if we have staked our whole existence and our future and our happiness and our hopes and our dreams only in this world, it will eventually come to nothing. What does it profit a man, says Jesus, if he gains the whole world and loses his own soul? Whatever you do in this world, don't lose your own soul. And we can only be sure of one thing, and that is the word that Jesus has promised, that if we come to Him and believe in

Him, we will be saved. Whatever happens in this world, we will be brought into this great kingdom. In which thousands, millions, billions of people will belong, worshipping and serving and enjoying God as we never thought possible. Let's pray.

Father in heaven, we give thanks then this evening for the great promises that are in the Bible. And we pray tonight that you will create within anyone who doesn't know you a real longing, a sense of emptiness that can only be filled as they come to see and understand and as they come to put their faith in Jesus Christ as Savior. Father, this is our great longing and desire. We thank you that whilst you had to warn your people against how they were living, that nestled within that warning was a promise that extended beyond the immediate future into the far away years and centuries that lay ahead. We thank you that we live in those days. And we thank you that today we are the recipients. We have tasted the Lord Jesus Christ.

We know what he has done for us and we praise you for it. But we pray for more. We pray that more and more people will come to know him and will come to be part of this guaranteed glorious future. In Jesus' name, amen.