

H.L. Rossier

Comments on the book of the Prophet Micah

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By H.L. Rossier

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FOREWORD

Prophecy, like the rest of Scripture, is only revealed to the Christian if the Holy Spirit has provided the key. Without this key, even the most learned man will never enter into the mind of God and will only demonstrate ignorance in seeking to explain it. The key is Christ. Unless every prophecy is linked to His person, to His sufferings and His glories, to His power and His coming as the Son of Man into His kingdom (1 Peter 1:11; 2 Peter 1:16; Matt. 16:28; Mark 9:1), it will remain a book as sealed to the learned as to the unlettered (Isaiah 29:11, 12), and this is how so many disagreements, even amongst Christians, regarding the interpretation of the Holy Book are explained.

Thus prophecy speaks to us of Christ. The earlier prophets, among whom we count Hosea, Isaiah and Micah, present his person in a far more striking and detailed manner than the later prophets, such as Jeremiah, Ezekiel and even Daniel. Only the last of the prophets, Zechariah and Malachi, as they draw nearer to the moment when Christ will be revealed, see him appear before their eyes in all his mighty reality, not so much, as

in Isaiah and Micah, in his humiliation and suffering, but in his coming in power. Finally, the full light bursts forth when the last and greatest of the prophets, John the Baptist, sees Jesus coming to him as the Lamb of God, the Son of God and the King of Israel (*).

(*) This is a far cry from the idea in modern theology that the ‘messianic concept’ developed gradually among the prophets following ‘a vague and indeterminate primitive outline’. This idea is the worthy counterpart of that which sees ‘the prophetic gift’ as an innate faculty of humanity.

However, whilst the central focus of prophecy is ‘the Revelation of Jesus Christ’, it also presents us with other subjects, the most important of which is God’s government in this world. Without the prophetic writings of the Old Testament—from which the historical books must not be separated—we would be very poorly informed on this point. All of them reveal to us what God’s ways of government have been in the past and present, with regard to His earthly people and the nations. God makes it clear on every occasion that He is a holy God who cannot tolerate iniquity: He must judge it, yet He calls men to

repentance. The prophecy of Amos presents this truth in a remarkable way, although, for that matter, it is found in all the prophets. But prophecy does not confine itself to the past and the present; it unveils the future, for it is of the utmost importance to show mankind that God's ways remain unchanging and that His government never alters in character. As evil grows in the world, God's judgments become ever more severe and will finally reach their climax in the judgment of the Antichrist (the false Messiah), in the judgment of his people (the apostate Jews), and of all the nations, united against true Israel and its true King.

However, God's government is not limited to destroying the obstacles that Satan raises against Him in the world. The Lord disciplines, rebukes and chastises His people, for He seeks not only the judgment of evil, but the triumph of good in the hearts of those who know Him and submit to Him. Thus all the prophets teach us that discipline, when received and accepted, will bring about in the end times a true Restoration which will gather the future Remnant of Israel and the faithful from

among the nations under the glorious sceptre of Christ, when He takes possession of His earthly inheritance.

* * *

From a general perspective, we encounter two categories of prophets. Some are raised up whilst the Lord's relationship with His people still endures; others, when that relationship has been definitively severed and the sentence of 'Lo-Ammi' (not My people), foretold by Hosea, has become a reality.

In the first category, the Lord still speaks of 'my people', as in Hosea, Isaiah, Micah and others. However, whilst these relations have not yet been severed, it is said: 'You have forsaken your people' (see, for example, Isaiah 2:6), one must not conclude that the Lo-Ammi has been pronounced, even though it is then very close to being fulfilled with regard to the ten tribes. This abandonment is similar to that of which Gideon speaks to the Angel of the Lord: 'The Lord has forsaken us' (Judges 6:13). This was bound to happen whenever Israel, placed by the law under a bilateral covenant with God, had forsaken the Lord, but it did not yet imply a definitive severing of relations

between God and his people. The entire Book of Judges, the whole history of the Kings, Isaiah, Micah, and even Jeremiah, who prophesied on the eve of the captivity, bear witness to this. Rule had not yet been transferred to the Gentiles; it was only under Nebuchadnezzar, the ‘head of gold’ of the four universal empires, that this occurred. Even the deportation of the ten tribes did not put an end to the existence of God’s people, represented in His sight by the kingship of Judah and the temple of Jerusalem, and still recognised by Him.

With the captivity of Judah begins the second category of prophets. The ‘Lo-Ammi’ is pronounced. This does not mean that God does not wish to resume His relationship with Israel later on the basis of a new covenant, this time unilateral; merely, when ‘Lo-Ammi’ is definitively pronounced, the Lord no longer says ‘my people’. He will not utter these words again until He speaks of the restoration of His future relationship with Israel—a relationship which the faith of the faithful, grounded in God’s promises, will bring to pass in the days to come. This is found in Ezekiel, Daniel, and other prophets of

the captivity (Ezek. 36:28; 37:23, 27; 38:14, 16; 39:7; 46:18; Dan. 9:15, 16; Zech. 8:8; 13:9).

* * *

Another important point concerns the existence or severance of God's relationship with his people. As long as this relationship exists, even to the slightest degree, and the Lord can say, 'my people', the historical Assyrian is the great enemy of Israel (see 2 Kings, Isaiah, Micah). Moreover, this historical Assyrian—be it Pul, Tiglath-Pileser, Shalmaneser, Sennacherib or Ashurb-anipal—is always presented by the prophet as a type of the future Assyrian, or the prophetic Assyrian of the end times. The latter is, so to speak, merely the continuation of the former, for prophecy—whether concerning historical figures or events— invariably refers us to the end of time. Present events therefore always bear a striking resemblance to events yet to come. This in no way diminishes their immense importance as present judgments, for they serve as a warning to the people's conscience and urge them to return to the Lord whilst there is still time (*).

(*) The terms we use: the historical Assyrian and the prophetic Assyrian do not imply that these are two different powers. The prophetic Assyrian is the same power as the other, only with territorial boundaries which, over the centuries, have expanded considerably and today constitute the vast domain of Russian power, together with whatever it might yet annex from Turkey.

It may be useful to repeat here what we have said elsewhere about the ‘prophetic Assyrian’, a subject often unfamiliar to those who study prophecy.

The three great enemies of the end are:

1. The Roman Empire, or the fourth universal empire, the fourth Beast of Daniel (7:7), the first Beast of the Apocalypse whose fatal wound was healed (13:1–4). This empire will be resurrected in the form of a Latin confederation of ten kings with its Leader, an emperor whose capital will be Rome. This figure will possess all the power once granted by God to Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, and to the empires that succeeded him, but will be raised up at the end of time by Satan as an antagonist of Christ and his

reign (*). It is important to note that Babylon, which will never be restored as an empire, is regarded in Revelation not as an example of a national resurrection similar to that of the Roman Empire, but as the final apostasy of Christendom, in its religious, political and commercial forms, in connection with the Roman Empire (Rev. 17, 18).

(*) See the Appendix at the end of this volume.

2. The Antichrist. He places himself at the head of the former people of God, who have become apostates from Judaism just as Christianity will become from Christianity, and he rises as a false King and false Messiah to the throne of God, after having seized ‘the inheritance of the Lord’ in order to hand it over to Satan. However small the territory of Palestine may be, it is of greater importance in God’s eyes than all the lands of the nations, for it is this land that the Lord once chose, as well as Jerusalem, which He intends to make the glorious capital of His earthly kingdom. It is there that He will establish His throne; from there shall go forth all the decrees of the one infallible universal

kingdom, called ‘the eternal kingdom of the Son of God’. The claim to usurp this power will bring upon the head of the Antichrist the terrible blows of God’s wrath; this false Christ will be mercilessly destroyed along with all his followers when the true Messiah appears.

3. The Assyrian. His role is central, though not exclusive, in the prophecies of Isaiah and Micah. Although by the time of the later prophets the rule of the historical Assyrian had come to an end, his prophetic role remained intact and was yet to be fulfilled. The Assyrian had appeared before the people had definitively become Lo-Ammi; he will reappear at the moment when the Lord’s relations with Israel have been renewed through the formation of a believing Remnant, and when God will once again say ‘my people’ (*). It is to the appearance of the Assyrian that the great end-time conflict will be linked, which will pit against one another around Jerusalem the fourth universal empire—or Roman Empire—re-established by Satan, and the Assyrian, once defeated by Babylon but who will rise again to contest world supremacy with Rome. This proph-

etic Assyrian reappears in a form different from that of old, but, in contrast to the Babylonian power which has been definitively destroyed, it is still represented today by Russia with its formidable Asian power. Only in prophetic times will the political character of this empire have undergone significant changes. There will no longer be any mention of the king of Assyria, but of Gog, prince of Rosh, Meshech and Tubal, who rules over the land of Magog—that is to say, an Assyrian confederation seeking to act as a counterweight to the Latin confederation. The king of the North is, it seems, the commander of the Assyrian armies. This king occupies Asia Minor, a territory once conquered by the King of Assyria and which, after the fall of Alexander’s empire, became the kingdom of the Seleucids and the Antiochians. Asia Minor is always referred to as the North in relation to Palestine (see Dan. 11). The Assyrian confederacy, represented by the King of the North, thus stands as an adversary to the Roman Beast, the Antichrist in Palestine, but also to the King of the South in Egypt. The Eastern Question then resurfaces in all its

acuteness. The clash can only take place in Palestine, and this country is the final stake through which Satan hopes to win the game. He was defeated a first time on the cross, and that victory ushered in the heavenly kingdom of the Lamb. He will be defeated a second time when the Assembly, the heavenly Bride, having been caught up to her Bridegroom, he, the devil, will be cast down to the earth with his angels. If he is defeated a third time, his dominion will be finished. For him to survive, Jerusalem, the seat of earthly power, having been taken from the true King, must remain in the hands of the Antichrist and the Roman Beast, his ally, with whom the devil has formed a murderous alliance. The Assyrian, driven by his pride, ambition and greed, will thwart all of Satan's plans, for he will wish to act independently of him. His actions will result in a Judeo-Latin coalition against the Assyrian and his armies.

(*) Therefore, when you find in the prophets the phrase 'My people', either the historical Assyrian still exists, or the prophetic Assyrian has entered the scene, as God has just resumed His relationship with the true Israel, that is to say, the Remnant.

On the other hand, and this will become partly clear to us from our study of the prophet Micah, the Assyrian is the final rod raised by the Lord against the Jewish people who have become apostate and subjects of the Antichrist. The cause of this punishment is to be found in their rejection of the Messiah. God also uses this Assyrian attack to complete the restoration of the Remnant of Judah through repentance (see Joel 2). Under Hezekiah, the historical Assyrian had been unable to conquer Jerusalem, whilst extending his ravages throughout the whole territory of Judah. But the final retribution had not yet come, and although God delivered Jerusalem to the nations to be trampled underfoot until this day, He did not allow the Assyrian to touch it permanently. The time is coming, however, when God will raise the rod of his wrath one last time against the unbelieving people, against that Jerusalem in which the blood of all the prophets will be found, and above all that of the ‘Judge of Israel’. This future invasion of Palestine and Judea by the king of the North will be widespread. Jerusalem will be besieged and conquered by the Assyrian’s allied peoples; half of its population will be taken into captivity. The Assyrian will

then turn on Egypt, but, on his return, besieging Jerusalem once more, after the Beast and the Antichrist have been annihilated along with their armies by the appearance of Jesus, descending from heaven with all his saints, the Assyrian himself will be destroyed on the mountains of Israel and cast into the eternal fire with his multitudes. For details of his destruction ‘in the last days’, see chapters 38 and 39 of Ezekiel concerning Gog, for Gog is the Assyrian of whom God had ‘spoken in former days through his servants the prophets of Israel’ (Ezek. 38:17).

* * *

Although Isaiah and Micah, whom we are considering here, speak to us chiefly of the historical and prophetic Assyrian, this does not mean that these prophets do not mention the empires of the nations, the first of which is Babylon; but these empires do not take centre stage (see Isaiah 13:1; 39:6; Micah 4:10). When, on the other hand, the Lord’s relationship with Israel is definitively severed by the people’s sin, these same empires—Babylon, the Medes and Persians, Alexander, the Roman Em-

pire—come to the fore. See, for example, Ezekiel, Daniel, Zechariah. Jeremiah does not even mention Assyria, because this prophet's subject is the empire entrusted to the nations, with Babylon at their head, after dominion has been taken away from the people of Israel. Jeremiah speaks to us of the judgement of Babylon, and it seems, in this prophet, that everything is concluded with its fall. For Jeremiah, all the universal empires that succeeded Babylon virtually fall with it. Daniel provides us with the details of their destruction. In all the aforementioned prophets, the historical Assyrian has completely disappeared (his role having properly ended with the ruin of Nineveh and the advent of Babylon) to make way for the prophetic Assyrian, the final enemy who will be annihilated by the Lord's personal presence on earth. Jeremiah alone, as we have said, speaks of neither one nor the other.

Just as the historical Assyrian had entered the scene before the Lord's relations with His people were severed, so he reappears at the very moment when those relations are restored. The Remnant, the true Israel, has come to repentance and the glory of Christ is about to appear, when the Assyrian rises up against

His people after having served in the judgement of apostate Israel, the people of the Antichrist. We say that the Assyrian is the last enemy of the end times. Chapters 38 and 39 of Ezekiel prove this. They in fact conclude the prophecy of Ezekiel, with all the final chapters (40–48) devoted to the restoration of the temple and the division of the land. Now, what do these two chapters tell us? Of the prophetic Assyrian, the last enemy who will be destroyed. The same applies to the Book of Daniel: the prophetic Assyrian is also there as the last enemy to invade the land of the Lord, only to be destroyed, when the mountain of holy beauty has already been established in the midst of Israel (Dan. 11:45). Likewise in Joel, a prophecy without a date but dealing entirely with the last days, the focus is solely on the prophetic Assyrian and the gathering of all the nations in Palestine to be judged, after repentance has entered the hearts of the Remnant and the Lord has revealed Himself to them. Then the Lord can say once more: ‘My people’ (Joel 2:26, 27).

However terrible the Assyrians may be, historically speaking, they are not the instrument of the people’s final dispersion. On the contrary, as we have seen, in the past they were the rod

against God's still-acknowledged people, and in the future they will be the rod to destroy the apostate people; yet their presence brings about the repentance of the Remnant. It was never entrusted to the Assyrians that universal dominion should be. It could have been the portion of faithful Israel; it was taken from them, because of their disobedience, to be placed in the hands of Babylon and the universal empires that succeeded it. It will be restored to true Israel, to the restored people of God, under the sceptre of the Messiah. Despite a reign lasting nearly nine centuries (whereas the Babylonian empire lasted no more than 80 years), universal dominion was never entrusted to Assyria. With the capture of Nineveh, Assyria ceases to be God's present rod against Israel and the nations; yet its first appearance—whether through its principles, its pride, or the terror it inspires—is but a prelude to its reappearance at the end of time. When he reappears, it will be to be delivered, he and his armies, to utter destruction, after having stirred up against himself the confederacy of the Roman Empire and its ten kings and having served as a rod against the people of the Antichrist (*). To understand his role in prophecy, one must bear this re-

appearance in mind. The historical Assyrian is but a faint shadow of what the prophetic Assyrian will be, yet both share the same character. Nor are their principles exclusive to them. In the current conflict between nations, certain peoples display the same characteristic traits: boundless pride and ambition, hatred, barbarism, a reign of terror, summary executions, cruelty, and the mass deportation of defenceless populations. However, let us not forget that what drives both the historical and the prophetic Assyrian is hatred towards the ancient people of God. This is already the case today, as seen in the way Russia—the nucleus of the future Assyrian confederation—treats the Jews scattered throughout its territory. As for Christians, the same is true of Turkey, which possesses a large part of the territory of ancient Assyria. The appalling massacres of the Armenians make this all too clear.

(*) *As a kingdom subject to the rule of Christ, Assyria will be restored (Isaiah 19:23–25).*

We must still say a few words about the Remnant, one of the themes that fills the book of Micah and without an understanding of which the prophetic events would remain an indecipher-

able enigma. It is impossible to overstate the immense role of the Remnant in the prophetic future. The reader will spare us the need to prove this to him with quotations, for all the prophets, all the Psalms, and a good portion of the Lord's discourses to his disciples (including the Sermon on the Mount and the prophecy of Matthew 24) bear witness to it.

It is the Remnant that constitutes the whole of the future Israel of which it is said: 'All Israel will be saved' (Rom. 11:26).

The Remnant will be made up of believers from Judah and from the ten tribes.

The Remnant of Judah is particularly prominent in the prophets and the Psalms, for this part of the people of Israel alone was guilty of the murder of its Messiah, and will have to bear, during the great tribulation, the weight of God's wrath in the governance of His former people. The distress these believers will have to endure will bring about complete repentance in them, and they will look, for deliverance, to 'Him whom they have pierced' (Zech. 12:10).

The Remnant of Judah will begin to form upon the return of the unbelieving Jewish people to Palestine, and will refuse to submit to the Antichrist whom that people will acclaim as their King. Its activity will begin in Jerusalem. It will initially consist of the ‘wise men of the people who will instruct the multitude’ (Dan. 11:33, 35; 12:3, 10). These wise men will have the same character as the disciples who, before the Church Age, surrounded Jesus here on earth. They will be upright and righteous according to the law (see Ps. 119), yet at the same time they will recognise their Messiah in Jesus, who was once crucified; the sin of their people against him; their own guilt, as part of that people; and finally the righteousness of God’s ways towards them, in the ‘distress’ they will have to endure. They will look to the Lord alone, entrusting themselves to Him for the hour of deliverance.

This awakening of conscience is accompanied by the preaching of the Gospel of the Kingdom in all the cities of Israel, by the faithful of the Remnant. They thus continue the mission of the seventy (Luke 10:1); and this preaching will only come to an end at the appearance of the Son of Man (Matt. 10:23).

The Antichrist, whom their testimony greatly troubles and irritates, will persecute them when he replaces the worship of the Lord—originally granted to the people—with idolatry established in the temple of Jerusalem. They will flee in accordance with the Saviour’s command (Matt. 24:16–21), and will be providentially sheltered amongst the nations that will come to their aid (Rev. 12:15, 16). They will be among them, just as they were for the cities of Israel, as evangelists of the Kingdom and instruments of the conversion of a vast multitude. Many of them, having remained in Jerusalem, will suffer martyrdom there.

The fleeing Remnant will return to Palestine to witness the defeat of their enemies, to see the glorious appearance of their King and Saviour, and to share in his triumph. They will witness the destruction of the Roman Beast, the Antichrist, Assyria and Edom, and finally the annihilation of the apostate people, the ‘vengeance’ spoken of in the prophets.

The faithful, together with the believing Remnant of the ten tribes, who have returned to Palestine after them, will form the

people of Israel in the millennial kingdom. The new covenant will be made with them; the law will be written on their hearts; they will observe the ceremonies and feasts associated with the new temple of the Lord; a prince from the house of David, viceroy of the glorious Messiah, will be established over them. All nations will be gathered around Jesus, Lord and King, and his people, the visible centre of the blessings of that future age.

This brief outline, though far from complete for such a vast subject, will, we hope, suffice to convey the immense role of the Remnant in the events of the end, in the restoration of Israel, and in the establishment of Christ's universal kingdom.

* * *

In closing, we wish to explain why we have adopted, in this study, the method of paraphrase—a form often monotonous for the reader—to which, for other reasons, the study of the prophet Hosea had compelled us. The great variety of speakers necessitated this approach. At times, and often within the same verse, we hear the Lord speaking, either alone or through the mouth of his prophet; at other times, the prophet speaks for

himself. The Remnant constantly speaks up and responds to the Lord or to his prophet; sometimes we hear the whole people speaking, and at other times the unfaithful prophets. If one fails to distinguish these various speakers, the text—usually clear and lucid—often appears obscure in the most important passages. We shall note these shifts as they occur; to demonstrate their importance, it would suffice to quote the entire beginning of chapter 5.

CHAPTERS 1 and 2

Judgement of the people by the historical Assyrian. Moral condition and final restoration of Israel

Chapter 1:

The judgement of Samaria and Judah by the Assyrian

This chapter is a historical account that outlines the sin of Samaria. The attack by the Assyrian Sennacherib is the consequence of this. This invasion extends as far as the gates of

Jerusalem, where it is halted by divine intervention, in response to Hezekiah's faith.

'The word of the Lord that came to Micah of Moresheth in the days of Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, which he saw concerning Samaria and Jerusalem' (v. 1).

The prophet Micah had left a vivid memory in Jerusalem, for his words came to mind when Jeremiah prophesied against that city, nearly a century after Micah, at the beginning of Jehoiakim's reign, some twenty years before the capture of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple (Jer. 26:18). The priests and the prophets—for it is always from the priestly class that the persecution of God's true servants originates—these men had seized Jeremiah and sought to put him to death, but God watched over His prophet. The princes, and even the people, who had at first risen up against Jeremiah, came to his defence and said, 'This man does not deserve to die, for he has spoken to us in the name of the Lord our God.' Then some of the elders of the land took his side, saying: 'Micaiah of Moresheth prophesied in the days of Hezekiah, king of Judah, and spoke to all

the people of Judah, saying: “Thus says the Lord of hosts: Zion shall be ploughed like a field, and Jerusalem shall become heaps of rubble, and the mountain of the house, the high places, a forest” (Micah 3:12). Did Hezekiah, king of Judah, together with all Judah, put him to death? Did he not fear the Lord, and did he not implore the Lord, so that the Lord relented from the evil he had pronounced against them? And we would be doing great harm to our own souls’ (vv. 18, 19). It was thus, through the word of the prophet Micah, received by the godly Hezekiah, that the Lord saved the prophet Jeremiah. The memory of Micah was therefore still alive in Jerusalem, more than a century after his time. To condemn Jeremiah was to condemn Hezekiah, the most faithful king in the line of the kings of Judah; who, then, would have dared to go against the decision he had made? The authenticity of the Book of Micah is thus confirmed to us.

This passage further shows that a significant part of Micah’s prophecy, covering three reigns, was delivered during the reign of Hezekiah. Jotham was a king after God’s own heart, but the characters of Ahaz and Hezekiah play the leading roles in the

book we are studying. The first, Ahaz, presents us with the decline and ruin of Judah. Under his reign, everything is corruption, transgression, and abandonment of the Lord. Ahaz, a follower of the abominable cult of Molech, sacrifices his son by fire (2 Kings 16:3). He refuses the merciful help that God offers him, through the ministry of Isaiah (Isaiah 7:10–13), against Rezin, king of Syria, and Pekah, king of Israel, on the pretext that he did not wish to ‘put the Lord to the test’, whilst he had decided to appeal to the king of Assyria, in whom he had more confidence than in God. He plunders the temple to send a gift to this ally, sets aside the bronze altar and the laver to adopt the idolatrous worship of Damascus, disregards the type of Christ’s atonement and priesthood to erect a pagan altar; in short, he submits to the yoke and influence of Tiglath-Pileser, the Assyrian. Hezekiah, on the contrary, signals a true reformation in Jerusalem. He shakes off the domination of Sennacherib, the Assyrian, resists him in the name of the Lord, and becomes the instrument of Jerusalem’s deliverance (Isaiah 36–39). One is the image of the dreadful apostasy of the Jewish people in the end times, the other that of the faithful Remnant,

whose sentiments he so admirably expresses in his song (Isaiah 38), and who stands firm against the Enemy through simple trust in the Lord when all seems lost. One might say of these three kings that the first, Jotham, represents the past blessings of Israel, that the second is the image of its future apostasy, and the third that of its final restoration. We can already see, from the history of the last two kings, who the enemy presented by Micah will be—that Assyrian whose future role our Preface has explained.

These three kings thus symbolically summarise the entire content of the book of Micah; only the judgments of which he speaks fall upon Judah and Israel, for the ten tribes are included therein. Thus the first verse tells us that Micah saw this word ‘concerning Samaria and Jerusalem’. This judgement took place historically through the Assyrian against the ten tribes and their capital, as well as against the territory of Judah, whose capital was spared; but in the last days, Jerusalem will be spared no more than Samaria. Indeed, whilst the historical Assyrian failed to devastate Jerusalem, it will be devastated for the first time under the prophetic Assyrian (Zech. 14:2; Ps. 83),

and then, during the final invasion, it will be protected by the appearance of the Lord. As in the time of Hezekiah, the full might of this formidable enemy will come to a halt before the walls of Jerusalem. There is therefore a striking analogy between Micah's prophecy and the era in which it was given. This analogy does not stand out with the same clarity in Isaiah, whose subject matter is much broader than that of Micah, his contemporary. Indeed, Isaiah encompasses the entire field of prophecy, and no part of it is foreign to him. However, as in Micah, the Assyrians of the end times play the predominant role. Micah is much more focused, and his brief prophecy is of great use in helping us to consider certain limited parts of the vast prophetic field in their own right, rather than in relation to the whole.

Whilst it is clearly stated here that Micah prophesies 'concerning Samaria and Jerusalem', it should nevertheless be noted that Samaria and the ten tribes occupy a less prominent place in this book than Jerusalem, whose sin and deliverance are given primary importance.

* *

‘Hear this, all you peoples; listen, O earth, and all that is in you; and let the Lord God be a witness against you, the Lord from his holy dwelling! For behold, the Lord is coming out of his place; he will come down and tread upon the high places of the earth; and the mountains will melt beneath him, and the valleys will split open, like wax before the fire, like waters poured down a slope” (vv. 2–4). These verses show that whilst judgement is the result of the Lord’s indignation against his people, and whilst he uses the nations as a rod of his anger against Israel, they too will in turn face judgement. All peoples are called to listen; the whole earth and all that is in it must pay heed. The Lord is a witness against all the nations; his testimony comes from the palace of his holiness, from the temple where he has caused his name to dwell and from which his throne has not yet departed, as in the prophet Ezekiel. Verse 2 of our chapter recalls the beginning of Isaiah (1:2); only, in the latter, the audience is much wider. The heavens and the earth are called to bear witness, because this concerns the iniquity of Israel, a people privileged above all others, to whom God had

revealed himself and whom he called his people. Thus, only a ‘very small remnant’ is left to them. The greatness of the privilege calls for the greatness of the judgement. In Micah, God gives a foretaste of the fact that He will judge both His people and the nations, although the basis of this judgement lies in Jacob’s transgression. He first explains the necessity of this punishment—which I call historical—upon His people. Hence the mention of the temple in this passage. In v. 3, the judgement takes on much broader proportions. In Isaiah, heaven bore witness against Israel; here, heaven opens to let the Supreme Judge descend. A terrible judgement! The mountains, all the powers established on the earth, bow down and melt away before Him. God’s judgement is not merely the result of His ways in government; but the image used here describes a future, universal judgement, from which neither the Jewish people, nor the nations, nor the inhabitants of the earth will be exempt. However, reassuringly, if the Lord ‘treads upon the high places of the earth’, not only His heavenly people, but the believing Remnant of Israel will be spared and will be able to say: ‘The Lord, the Lord, is my strength; He will make my feet

like those of a deer, and He will make me walk upon my high places' (Hab. 3:19). From the very beginning of the judgments, the Lord's elect will have the privilege of walking with Him. All that will be required is faith—that simple faith which would have enabled Peter to walk on the water if, instead of looking at the waves, he had fixed his eyes on Jesus alone.

'All this is because of the transgression of Jacob and the sins of the house of Israel' (v. 5). Whilst the Lord's wrath originates from the sin of His people and He judges them through the nations, the latter in turn, as we have seen, draw His wrath upon themselves by the manner in which they carry out His judgments.

“Whose is the transgression of Jacob? Is it not Samaria's? And whose are the high places of Judah? Are they not Jerusalem's?” (v. 5).

Jacob seems to me here, as elsewhere, to be the whole nation with Judah as its leader; his transgression began in Samaria, the capital of the house of Israel, that is to say, of the ten tribes, where idolatry was first introduced. Even though it began

there, after the division of the kingdom, under Jeroboam, son of Nebat, God holds the whole people responsible for this sin, for, whilst He makes distinctions in the judgement of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah, in His eyes they cannot absolve one another of responsibility. Is it not the same today? The whole people of God are jointly responsible for the sin and ruin of the Church. No part of it can separate itself from the other and escape judgement by claiming not to be responsible for what has happened, or by believing it can rebuild what all have ruined. However, amidst the ruins, there remains, as a testimony, a humiliated Remnant who groans and sighs (Ezek. 9:4), and it is upon them, as Micah and all the prophets teach us, that God's eyes rest.

As for the 'high places of Judah', Jerusalem alone is responsible. The favoured city, the seat of God's government, where He had His temple and His throne, was particularly guilty and could not shift the blame for its idolatry onto the ten tribes who did not enjoy the same blessings. The Lord begins with Samaria, for its judgement is at hand, and from then on Micah will speak of it far less in the course of his prophecy, which

will henceforth focus almost exclusively on the iniquity of Jerusalem.

‘And I will make Samaria a heap in the fields, a place for planting vineyards; I will roll its stones down into the valley, and lay bare its foundations. And all its carved images shall be shattered; and all its gifts of prostitution shall be burnt with fire; and I will lay all her idols waste; for with a harlot’s gift she gathered them, and they shall again become a harlot’s gift’ (vv. 6, 7). Later (3:12), the same fate will befall Jerusalem, in the passage quoted in Jer. 26:18 by the prophet’s defenders. The impending judgement on Samaria had already been announced in a few words by the prophet Amos (3:11), with the difference, however, that he attributes this judgement to the violence, oppression and plundering of the nobles, whereas Micah mentions only idolatry at first (vv. 8–16). In the opening verses of our chapter, the prophet was the voice of the Lord to the people; in this passage he is the voice of the people: ‘he howls, laments, beats his breast, and cries out in mourning’. The nation does not feel the pain; the faithful feel it on its behalf. Is it not always so? In the circumstances that trouble

peoples today, which of them realise that ‘the wound is incurable’, that God must judge, that He is judging, that all that befalls them is but the fruit of their iniquities? We Christians, like Micah, are called to feel this. If we are to weep over ourselves and are led to salutary repentance, we also feel that the moral evil of the world is very close to reaching its peak and that God’s judgements are just. It may be that God, in his long-suffering patience, withdraws his hand for a moment, but the wound is incurable and current events are but a prelude to future events, even more terrible still.

‘For its wound is incurable; for it has reached as far as Judah, it has come as far as the gate of my people, as far as Jerusalem’ (v. 9). The wound stops at the gate. This is what happened historically under Hezekiah (Isaiah 36–38). Sennacherib’s invasion, described here in verses 10–16, is the same as that mentioned in Isaiah 10: 24–34, but differs significantly in that Isaiah lists the successive stages of the Assyrians’ direct invasion to capture Jerusalem, whilst Micah lists the causes of the judgement that befalls the various cities of Judah in the course of the invasion. This comparison between Isaiah and Micah 1

leads us to the following conclusion: Sennacherib's great attack on Jerusalem (Isaiah 10) took place via the territory of Benjamin. The victorious enemy captured all the towns and villages of this tribe and finally reached Nob, the priestly town, the former scene of Saul's massacre of the priests, the final stage from which Jerusalem could be seen. He laid siege to this city, but the Lord was there and came to the aid of Hezekiah, whose faith relied on His intervention.

From there, the enemy, still keeping Jerusalem under siege, spread throughout the lowlands of Judah, to the west of Jerusalem (*), in the Shephelah plain which borders on Philistia and the Mediterranean Sea, and whose main towns—Gath, Lachish, Mareshah and Adullam, had once been fortified by Rehoboam against incursions by the Philistines (2 Chron. 11:9). Whilst the siege of Jerusalem continued, Sennacherib laid siege to Lachish. It seems doubtful that he captured it (2 Chron. 32:1; 2 Kings 18:13, 14; 19:8); he then besieged Libnah. It was from there that he sent his threats to Hezekiah for the second time. It was also there that he learnt of the expedition against him led by Tirhakah, king of Ethiopia, then Pharaoh of Egypt (2 Kings

19:8, 9). His army is struck down by the Lord; he lifts the siege of Jerusalem and returns to Nineveh, where he is murdered by his sons (2 Kings 19:35–37).

(*) Unless these were two simultaneous attacks: one from the north, the other from the west of Jerusalem.

Later, Nebuchadnezzar first captured Lachish and Azekah ‘which were still remaining’ (Jer. 34:7), and finally Jerusalem, under King Zedekiah, who had broken the oath he had sworn.

On their return from captivity, the men of Benjamin reoccupied some of their towns, which had previously been taken by the Assyrians during the attack on Jerusalem from the north (Aiath, Michmash, Geba, Rama, Anathoth, Nob) (Neh. 11:31–36), whilst the men of Judah reoccupied Lachish and Adullam (Neh. 11:30).

This is a brief account of the Assyrian invasion, whether of the territory of Benjamin or that of Judah. Micah reports only the invasion of Judah. Many of the towns mentioned in our passage have not been identified, but research leads to the conclusion that they are all situated in the western region of Judah, in

the lowlands of that tribe. A few, such as Gath, occupied the mountainous edge of this territory.

These details bring us back to verses 8 to 16 of our chapter:

In v. 8, the words ‘because of this’ indicate the prophet’s mourning over the ruin of Samaria. This incurable plague has spread to Judah and reached as far as Jerusalem. ‘Do not tell it in Gath, shed no tears’ (v. 10). These words: ‘Do not tell it in Gath’ had, I have no doubt, become a proverb since the ‘Song of the Bow’, David’s lament for Jonathan (2 Sam. 1:20). It was a way of saying to Samaria: Do not reveal your defeat, nor especially that of Hoshea, your king, to the Philistines who hate you. This proverb thus links the fall of Saul and the victory the Philistines won over him to the fall of the monarchy in Israel. Gath, whose location explorers have been unable to establish, was one of the five principal cities of the Philistines (Joshua 13:3; 1 Sam. 6:17), rising, as we have said, on the edge of the mountainous region of Judah. It was a constant threat to Jerusalem (2 Kings 12:17). Famous in the history of David (1 Sam. 17:4; 21:10; 27:3), it had been captured by this king along with

the towns under his jurisdiction (1 Chron. 18:1). Later, Uzziah had demolished its wall, as well as those of Jabneh and Ashdod (2 Chron. 26:6), fortified cities and a perpetual danger to Judah; he had also built cities in Philistine territory. It would seem, however, from Amos 6:2, that since Uzziah, Gath had been recaptured by the enemy. At the very beginning of his reign, Hezekiah, having shaken off the yoke of the king of Assyria, struck the Philistines as far as Gaza, though no mention is made of Gath (2 Kings 18:7, 8). In the fourth year of his reign and the ninth of Hoshea, king of Israel, Shalmaneser besieged Samaria, captured it, and brought an end to the kingdom of Israel. Micah had foretold the ruin of Samaria when Hezekiah's defeat of the Philistines was already nearing completion; what hateful and triumphant joy, then, must that people have felt—they who had just been defeated and humiliated by Judah—upon learning of the defeat of Israel and its king, which reminded them of their former victory. They were not to 'shed tears before them' (*).

(*) And not, as an untenable translation would have it, 'weep in Acco'.

This prophecy of Micah, concerning historical events of the very near future, confirms the idea, expressed more than once in the course of these studies, that in the prophets historical events are usually the image and forerunners of those that will take place in the last days. It will be in the region of Judah, of which this passage speaks, that the Assyrian of the end times will meet his fate (Ezek. 39:11; Dan. 11:45). However, instead of retreating, as Sennacherib did in the face of the Pharaoh's attack, he will invade Egypt and will only meet his fate upon his return from that expedition.

In these verses, the wordplay concerning the names of the cities seems to me to indicate that their inhabitants attributed, as has always been the case, a meaning—whether flattering or characteristic—to the name of their city. The prophet turns these puns against them by applying them to their ruin (*). This is what the names of which they boasted meant in God's eyes. Beth-Leaphra (v. 10), the house of dust, will roll in the dust. Shaphir, the beautiful one, will be violated. Tsaanán, 'she who has gone out', could not go out, being besieged herself, to come to the aid of Beth-Haëtsel, 'her neighbour', who laments,

for he (the Assyrian) is taking away from her the shelter on which she had relied.

(* This is how we say in our country about the town of Grandson: ‘small bell, loud ring’. Yes, the prophet would say: A loud ring of the calamity that is about to befall you!

The same applies to Maroth, ‘bitterness’, upon which evil descends through the siege of Jerusalem. Lakish must prepare for flight rather than resistance. It was through her that the idolatry of Jerusalem began, and the transgressions of the ten tribes were found in her. To my knowledge, this fact is not mentioned elsewhere. You will have to, says the prophet, relinquish your hold on Moreshet-Gath (perhaps Micah’s hometown), to which you were betrothed. The houses of Aczib, ‘falsehood’, will deceive the kings of Israel. It is possible that there were royal residences there, summer palaces. Another possessor, the Assyrian, will inherit Mareshah, ‘possession’. Adullam, whose cave had sheltered the fugitive David (1 Sam. 22:1; 2 Sam. 23:13; 1 Chron. 11:15), will become the last refuge of the glory of Israel, that is to say, of its great men and nobles, pursued by the enemy. ‘Shave your head and cut your hair,’ says the prophet at

last to Israel, ‘for the sons of your delights’, for those nobles who were your joy and glory; ‘make your tonsure wide like the vulture’s’, as a sign of abject mourning and the greatest affliction (Job 1:20; Isaiah 15:2), ‘for they’ (the sons of Israel’s delights) ‘have gone into captivity far from you’.

Throughout this entire first chapter, the prophet is the mouthpiece of the Lord or speaks personally. As we noted previously, this is not always the case in the course of this prophecy, where we hear in turn the Lord, the Remnant, the nation, and the false prophets speak.

Chapter 2

The moral state of the people. The final restoration of true Israel

Chapter 1 prophesied what was to befall Samaria and Jerusalem, with the exception, however, that, for the time being, the calamity would reach only as far as the gates of the latter. Chapter 2 describes the moral state of the people that necessitates such severe judgement. This moral state pertains to both

kingdoms. ‘Woe to those who plot vanity and devise evil on their beds! At the first light of day they carry it out, because it is within their power. They covet fields and seize them, and houses, and take them; they oppress a man and his house, a man and his inheritance’ (vv. 1, 2).

As in Amos, there are two ‘woes’ in Micah. The first opens our chapter; we find the second in v. 1 of chapter 7. The first Woe addresses the moral state of the people, considered here from a narrow perspective. They devise and carry out evil when they have the power to do so; they covet their neighbour’s wealth and seize it; they oppress the peaceful, steal their possessions, and spare neither the weak nor the lowly.

In chapter 7:1, the prophet pronounces a second ‘Woe’ upon himself. These ‘Woes’ constitute one of the many parallels between Micah and Isaiah, except that the latter is always much more explicit than our prophet. He pronounces, in chapter 5, six ‘Woes’ corresponding to the first, and, in chapter 6, a seventh corresponding to Micah’s second.

The ‘Woe’s’ in Isaiah condemn

1. Selfishness that thinks only of expanding and keeping everything for oneself (5:8);
2. The pursuit of wine and worldly pleasures (vv. 11, 12);
3. They denounce those who do evil knowingly, without regard for God or judgement (vv. 18, 19);
4. Those who call evil good and good evil (v. 20);
5. Those who think highly of themselves (v. 21);
6. Who devote their energies to degrading themselves, to justifying the wicked who are of use to them, and to slandering the righteous from whom they expect nothing.

But Isaiah, like our prophet, pronounces the seventh ‘Woe’ upon himself, for in Isaiah we find both a fullness of curse and a fullness of blessing (11:2) which are not found in Micah. We shall return to this last point in chapter 7.

‘Therefore, thus says the Lord: “Behold, I am devising against this family a calamity from which you cannot save yourselves;

and you shall not walk with your heads held high, for it is a time of trouble” (v. 3).

If they “devise vanity and prepare evil”, the Lord also devises evil against them, and it will surely overtake them. How little do men, filled to the brim with the evil designs of their hearts, think of what a just and holy God is preparing for them in silence! He knows how to wait patiently, but when lust, having conceived, gives birth to sin, and this has been consummated, the final judgement comes (James 1:15). Amos, who prophesied under Uzziah and Jeroboam, long before Micah, had shown the role of the wise man in the calamitous times of the end, the description of which, like that of Micah, bears such a close resemblance to the times in which we live. He had said: ‘Therefore, in these days the wise man will keep silent, for it is an evil time’ (Amos 5:13). Was it right to raise one’s voice and protest, when God Himself was meditating in silence? The wise man was to maintain the same attitude as his God and entrust himself entirely to Him, without seeking to intervene in the affairs of this world. Micah now shows us what the world’s attitude will be when it pleases God to intervene: ‘You will not

be able to lift your necks from under the yoke, nor walk with your heads held high, for this is an evil time.’ The fact is that then, as now, their pride had not been humbled by all the calamities that befell them. Now, the evil time they had imposed on others is falling upon them from the Lord, and their pride is crushed under the yoke of slavery.

‘On that day, you will be the subject of a proverb, and there will be a lamentation of bitter sorrow; they will say: “We are utterly destroyed; he has changed the portion of my people: how he has taken it from me! To those who turn away from the Lord, he has divided our fields’ (v. 4). Faced with this judgement, they become a proverb, as we saw in the previous chapter. They will have to acknowledge their utter destruction. Is all this very different from what we see today? People speak of their acquired rights, of their people and their nation, whilst seizing the fields and houses of others—attacks long premeditated and prepared in silence, whilst everyone ‘goes about in safety’. But the moment has come when God intervenes. A sudden destruction comes upon them. They are forced to cry out: ‘He has changed the portion of my people’; they who had

changed the portion of others! Even what they held as rightful possession is taken from them. Their boundary stones are moved. God gives their fields, not to those more righteous than they, but to those who turn away from the Lord! The Assyrian, that enemy of God, possesses their inheritance. What a shame! What a humiliation! God uses the enemy of God himself against them, whilst they, relying on their claim to be God's people, boasted that He would protect them from their enemies. 'He has divided our fields'—were these not the fields of their brothers (v. 2) which, contrary to all right, they had seized?

'Therefore you shall have no one to stretch out a measuring line to divide a portion in the congregation of the Lord' (v. 5). Now the prophet addresses them. He envisions a future time when the congregation will be gathered, not the return from captivity, but the final restoration of the people from which they will be excluded. They shall have no part in it. The sentence pronounced upon them for the near future, when the evil days of captivity will weigh like a yoke upon their necks, will not be the final word of their judgement. The prophet leads us on to the future and definitive exclusion of the apostate people

of the end, of all that will not be the true Israel, constituted by the faithful Remnant (Ps. 16:6).

‘Do not prophesy,’ they say (v. 6). This passage, which has much occupied commentators, presents no difficulty if one distinguishes the speakers so frequently found in Micah. “The prophets who lead the people astray” (3:5) are speaking here. They command the true prophets, their contemporaries Isaiah and Micah, not to prophesy. Micah replies to them: “If they do not prophesy to these people, the disgrace will not be removed” (v. 6). What is the purpose of a true prophet? It is to lead the people to repentance by showing them the shame of their ways and the judgments that result from them. Prophecy always has a merciful purpose, for, in revealing the judgment, it shows how one may escape it, and by what means God will bring deliverance. If there were no longer any prophets of the Lord, it would be impossible for judgement to be avoided, and this is what makes the intervention of unscrupulous prophets, seeking to nullify the work of the true ones, so infinitely culpable. If God were to let them have their way, it would be they who, in the end, would bear the responsibility for having made the de-

crees of justice irrevocable and the condition of the people beyond remedy.

‘You who are called the house of Jacob: Is the Lord impatient? Are these his ways? Do my words not bring good to those who walk uprightly? Not long ago my people rose up like an enemy: you strip the cloak and tunic from those who pass in safety, who turn away from war; you have driven the women of my people from the houses of their delight; from above their children, you have removed my splendour for ever’ (vv. 7–9).

The Lord now speaks to rebuke them, through the mouth of his own prophet. Can the house of Jacob, the whole of Israel represented by Judah, accuse God of lacking patience? Did he not warn Israel through all his prophets, even as his voice resounded in the wilderness? Did He not wish to bring His people to repentance? Did He strike a single blow prematurely and without cause? Are these His deeds? Has He not rewarded the upright and shown infinite patience towards the violent and the deceitful? ‘My people’ (Note that ‘my’. On the eve of the final judgement, the Lord still refrains from pronouncing Lo-Ammi)

acted as an enemy towards peaceful folk by falling upon them unawares and plundering them. Had those they attacked provoked them? And the defenceless women driven from their homes? And the children, stripped forever of the possessions the Lord had assured them?

‘Arise and go away! For this is no place of rest, because of the defilement that brings ruin: the ruin is terrible!’ (v. 10). The Lord’s indignation, long held in check, is at last unleashed. Let them arise! Let them depart! Let them go far from his presence! Let them wander far from their land, from a defiled land that can no longer be a place of rest and whose ruin is imminent, a terrible ruin! This is what the mouth of the Lord proclaims through the true prophet. The Lord has said: ‘Go away!’ and will not go back on his word.

But how serious this is for us! The world is a defiled place over which judgement hangs. Could we find rest there? We who seek peace, who turn away from war, let us not insist on our rights. Let the world take from us what belongs to us. We have a treasure, the words of the Lord, which make up for all that

the world might take from us! They have the power to keep us and to bring us in the end into our inheritance (Acts 20:32), and the world will have no ‘share’ in it (Col. 1:12).

‘If there is a man who walks according to the wind and lies, who lies, saying, “I will prophesy to you concerning wine and strong drink!”, he shall be the prophet of this people’ (v. 11). Here we find the contrast between the false prophets and the prophet of the Lord. They lie, flatter the passions of those to whom they speak, downplay evil when it comes to human lusts, and pander to their inclinations rather than oppose them. Is this not, at all times, the result of a ministry according to the flesh, to which the working of the Spirit of God is alien?

‘I will surely gather you together, Jacob, all of you; I will surely bring together the remnant of Israel; I will gather them together like the flocks of Bozrah, like a herd in the midst of its pasture. They will make a noise because of the multitude of people’ (v. 12).

In contrast to v. 10, where the Lord shamefully drives the defiled people from His presence, He now addresses Jacob in his

entirety, the Remnant of Israel who, in the future, will form the Lord's new people. God has this future people in mind when He says: 'All Israel shall be saved'. A precious thought also for the faithful amidst the present ruins of Christendom! God has in mind a Remnant hidden amongst those who vainly profess the name of Christ. This Remnant, like that of Israel of old, is scarcely recognised today, and yet it exists. A few, perhaps two or three, gather round the Lord, but how many wandering sheep are unaware of this gathering and sigh in their isolation! In the twinkling of an eye, when the Lord comes, He will gather them into an immense heavenly flock that 'will make a noise because of the multitude', just as He will gather the Remnant of Israel for His millennial earthly kingdom. If our eyes are dazzled by the earthly glory of restored Israel, what must the vision of the heavenly glory of the redeemed be to us, gathered round the great Shepherd of the sheep, and celebrating His praises, the echoes of which will resound endlessly throughout the spaces of the heavenly city! And from whom will these future blessings flow? The prophet tells us, from Christ alone:

‘He who breaks through has gone up before them; they have broken through and passed through the gate, and have gone out through it, and their King has gone before them, and the Lord is at their head’ (v. 13).

At present, it seems that the gathering of God’s ancient people is as impossible as that of the Church. Let us wait for the Lord, the King of Israel, to take the lead. He is the One who ‘breaks through’, who overcomes all obstacles. Likewise today, despite our ardent desire to see the gathering of God’s people, it is impossible for us to overcome the obstacles. But He will gather His people and take the lead.

In the case of Israel, He breaks through to lead them out. Christ will take the lead of this poor, oppressed Remnant, His sheep; He will go before them, remove every obstacle, and thwart all Satan’s efforts to destroy them and prevent their gathering; He will lead them out and separate them from this rebellious people. They will follow Him, ‘pass through the gate’ and go out through it.

This passage becomes clear when we see that its subject is the Remnant described as the small livestock of Bozrah, like a flock in the midst of its pasture. In v. 13, the Holy Spirit shows us in what manner and by what marvellous deliverance His people are led to enjoy this blessing. ‘They have passed through the gate,’ says the prophet. This gate is Christ, their Shepherd and their King. The whole passage of John 10:1–15 seems to be a commentary on this verse from Micah. The flock of Israel (the Remnant) will be gathered; the Lord will take their lead; He will be recognised by them as their sovereign Shepherd and their King, as the only way out from among an apostate people, as the only gateway into the millennial blessings. He will be for them the One who breaks through, that is to say, who destroys the obstacles piled up against them by Satan. He will impart to them the necessary strength, courage and virtue to win the victory. It will then be said of them: ‘They have broken through’.

This passage contains another remarkable statement: ‘He who breaks through has gone up before them’. This has already taken place for the Church. All the power of Satan has been re-

duced to nothing by the resurrection of Christ, who has overthrown the obstacle and broken through. It is also by virtue of his resurrection that nothing in the future will prevent his people Israel from passing through. Because he has gone before them, they will be set completely free, for they will go out under the guidance of the Shepherd, not to be sheltered, but to spread out, the Lord's innumerable flock, buzzing like a beehive, and to graze in the pastures of Canaan. 'Their King has gone before them'. He is the One who entered through the gate, fulfilling all God's will (John 10:2), and who, by that very fact, alone has the right to be our Saviour, just as He will be the Saviour of Israel. This King, this Saviour, this Shepherd, is the Lord Himself: 'The Lord is at their head'.

What blessed thoughts there are in this verse which, whilst applying so wonderfully to the future deliverance and gathering of God's people, applies all the more to our present deliverance. Jesus has brought us out and leads us: he brings us in with complete freedom into the Father's house; we enter there to enjoy fellowship with the Father and the Son, and go out to serve him. He has given us life, far more than He has given or

will ever give to His Jewish sheep, for it is called ‘life in abundance’, the eternal life that gives us a share and enjoyment with the Father and with the Son (John 10:9, 10). All these things belong to our present blessing; that of Israel, however marvellous it may be, in the future millennial times, does not come close to it. All the more so will it be inferior to it, when the Christian flock, the Assembly of the Good Shepherd, has been brought into glory, into His own glory!

The first section of our prophet’s message ends here. The Holy Spirit, after a vision of sin and judgement, delights to consider the future Restoration of the entire Remnant, led by their King, the Messiah, the Lord!

CHAPTERS 3 to 4: 8

The present ruin and God's purposes regarding the future Kingdom

Chapter 3

Moral ruin of all the ruling classes of the people. Judgement of the prophets. Destruction of Jerusalem

‘And I said: “Hear now, I pray you, leaders of Jacob, and you, princes of the house of Israel: Is it not for you to know what is right? You who hate what is good and love what is evil, who strip the skin from them and the flesh from their bones, who devour the flesh of my people and strip the skin from them, and who break their bones and cut them to pieces as in a cauldron, and as meat in the midst of a pot” (vv. 1–3).

Here we find one of those transitions, so frequent in the prophet Micah, from one speaker to another. After the Lord has spoken (2:7–13), the prophet takes the floor, first as a prophet (vv. 1–4), then as the mouthpiece of the Lord to accuse the treacherous prophets.

These words are addressed to the leaders and princes who represent the whole people, that is, Judah and Israel. They hate what is good and love what is evil, the exact opposite of true repentance, as it is said in Isaiah: ‘Take away from my sight the evil of your deeds; cease doing evil, learn to do good; seek justice; bring happiness to the oppressed’ (1:16, 17). These judges and nobles treat the flock of Israel, the object of all the care of the Good Shepherd (Micah 2:12, 13), as their prey. They tear off the skin to eat the flesh, a violent act, followed by a more calculated plan: ‘They strip the skin from them’, having found a way to use it; then they place the flesh and bones of the sheep in the cauldron to eat them thoroughly and lose nothing of what they profit from, to the detriment of the sheep they oppress.

‘Then they will cry out to the Lord, but he will not answer them; he will hide his face from them at that time, because they have acted wickedly’ (v. 4).

The day of retribution will come; they will cry out, but God will not answer. Can there be a more terrible judgement? The

cry of the soul to the Lord has always been heard (Ps. 22:5); not a single righteous person has gone unanswered, and this so that we might be saved (v. 2), but when the time of grace is over, it will be the wicked who will receive no answer. Can we imagine the horror of such a situation? An empty heaven! Indeed, it will be empty for them; the Lord will hide his face from them on that day. He had hidden it from his Beloved so that he might save us (Ps. 69:17); he will hide it from the faithful Remnant, but only for a moment, so that he might ‘have compassion on him with everlasting kindness’ (Isaiah 54:8); but from the wicked He will hide it forever. Of what days do the words ‘in those days’ speak to us? We see, in chapter 4, that they refer to the glorious and blessed days of Christ’s reign.

‘Thus says the Lord concerning the prophets who lead my people astray; who gnash their teeth and cry, “Peace!” and if anyone does not put anything in their mouths, they prepare for war against him. Therefore you shall have the night without a vision, and you shall have darkness without divination; the sun shall set upon the prophets, and the day shall be darkened over them. And the seers shall be ashamed, and the diviners shall be

confounded; they shall all cover their beards, for there is no answer from God' (vv. 5–7).

After the princes, the prophets. It is now the Lord himself who speaks against them through the mouth of Micah. Note that these are not false prophets, but prophets who use their gift to lead the people astray. Like dogs, they rise up against God's prophets to bite them (see Hab. 2:7 for the image). The latter proclaim war and judgement, the former peace, as in the days of Jeremiah. They lull the people into a false sense of security. They will be put to shame, for God will not make use of them nor entrust any revelation to them. They will be plunged into darkness and will see neither the day of visitation nor the day of light, when the sun of righteousness rises. They will be lepers to the Lord according to Lev. 13:45, or will mourn in vain, according to Ezek. 24:17, for God will have forsaken and rejected them. They will have no place among his people.

Can we not say the same things today? Ignorance of God's thoughts is a judgement upon those who, having received a gift from God, use it for their own gain. The gift is barren; there is

neither power nor edification in it. These men are ignorant of the sentence pronounced by God upon mankind; the most obvious truths revealed by God in His Word are hidden from them; they prophesy of peace and progress when judgement is already hanging over the nations and over their own heads. They do not see that ‘the end of days’ (4:1) will come only after their own judgement.

‘But I am filled with power by the Spirit of the Lord, and with judgment and might, to declare to Jacob his transgression and to Israel his sin’ (v. 8).

Here the prophet speaks up and speaks of himself, in contrast to these false servants. The true messenger of God is led by the Spirit of God, who is a Spirit of power, of judgement (or counsel), and of strength. This brings to mind 2 Tim. 1:7; yet, although the ‘Spirit of love’ is not mentioned here, it is nonetheless God’s love that announces judgement through His prophets, in order to bring the people back to Him, if possible. Hiding the sinners’ true condition from them by crying out ‘peace’ when God’s wrath is gathering is never an act of love. The true

prophet ‘declares to Jacob his transgression and to Israel his sin’.

The power of the man of God is always accompanied by a deep sense of weakness. Jeremiah said: ‘Ah, Lord God! Behold, I cannot speak, for I am only a child’ (1:6); but the Lord said to him: ‘I will make you, as regards this people, a wall of bronze, strong and firm; they will fight against you, but they shall not prevail against you’ (15:20). Gideon said: ‘I am the least in my father’s house’; the Lord replied: ‘I will be with you’; ‘go in the strength that you have’ (Judges 6:14–16). Daniel said: ‘There is no strength left in me’; God replied: ‘Do not be afraid... be strong, yes, be strong!’ (Dan. 10:17–19). Paul said: ‘When I am weak, then I am strong’ (2 Cor. 12:10). Whether it be to prophesy, to win victory in battle, to understand the thoughts of God, or to proclaim the Gospel, strength can only spring from the very heart of weakness, deeply realised in the soul before God; whereas, wherever the believer trusts in his own strength and says, like Samson: ‘I will go out as on other occasions’, the Lord has already ‘withdrawn from him’ (Judges 16:20).

‘Hear this, I pray you, leaders of the house of Jacob, and you, princes of the house of Israel, who abhor justice and pervert all righteousness, building Zion with blood and Jerusalem with iniquity. Its leaders judge for bribes, its priests teach for a fee, and its prophets divine for money, yet they rely on the Lord, saying, ‘Is not the Lord among us? No harm will come upon us!’” (vv. 9–11).

Having set out the character of the prophet according to God’s thoughts, Micah speaks again to accuse all the leaders and princes of Judah, as well as the ten tribes, and takes Jerusalem to task, just as he had done at the beginning with regard to Samaria. All classes of leaders pass before him: rulers, princes, priests and prophets—the civil and religious authorities as understood by man. To the list previously enumerated, the prophet adds the priests, in their capacity as teachers instructing the people. Money plays the leading role everywhere; material interests dominate. Can one, clothed in such dignities, bring them down in this way? But do we see anything different today? Undoubtedly the circumstances differ, the dignities have changed in character, but the principles that govern the various

classes of men, whether political or religious, are the same, because the selfishness of fallen man lies at the root of all the motives of his heart. A dreadful thing! All this is done in the name of the Lord, and all seek to reassure themselves when evil threatens them, saying, ‘Is not the Lord among us?’ In the wilderness, the sin of Israel was to doubt whether God was truly among His people. It is said of them that ‘they tested the Lord, saying, “Is the Lord among us or is He not?”’ (Ex. 17:7). They doubted His presence at the very moment when, having redeemed them from Egypt, He was openly manifesting Himself as their God. Here we find precisely the opposite. At the very moment when God pronounced ‘Woe’ upon them and delivered them into the hands of the enemy, sparing only the city of Jerusalem, and on the eve of the day when the solemn names Lo-Ammi and Lo-Rukhama were to resound, they dared to say: ‘Is not the Lord in our midst?’ Sin may vary according to the times. To distrust God in a time of grace is a great sin. To claim that one has God with oneself and on one’s side in a time of judgement and ruin is an even greater sin. Today, as in days of old, such things are heard; and the most guilty—sovereigns and

princes, doctors, pastors and prophets who lead nations into the abyss—are those who cry out loudest: ‘Is not the Lord in our midst?’ This is a deliberate effort by Satan to lead men astray. He would have them believe that the Lord can be the protector and sustainer of a state of affairs that is utterly evil. Thus he conceals evil and sin from man’s eyes by making him believe that God can be associated with it. ‘God is with us,’ they cry; ‘no harm shall come upon us!’ And on the eve of defeat, they still assert the certainty of victory!

Note that the greater the knowledge of God’s thoughts, contained in the law, and the closer the proximity to the Lord, the more terrifying the responsibility and the more severe the judgement. Was it any wonder that the nations, not knowing God, went ‘each in the name of their god’ (4:5)? But that God’s people, having fallen into disobedience and the blackest ingratitude towards the Lord, should dare, in their state of unfaithfulness, to rely on His name for reassurance—that was the height of wickedness.

In Isaiah 51:2 and Ezekiel 33:24 we find the same contrast. In the first of these passages, God says: ‘Look to Abraham your father, and to Sarah who bore you; for I called him alone, and I blessed him, and I multiplied him’. Those who seek the Lord are encouraged and exhorted here to look to Abraham, whom God blessed and multiplied, even though he was all alone. If the faithful are few in number, they may count on the same grace to multiply them and make them a great people in the future. The second passage (Ezek. 33:24) shows us the few wretched souls who remained in the desolate places of Palestine during the Babylonian captivity, relying on this very word that ‘Abraham was but one and yet he inherited the land’, to proclaim that they too would inherit it. To inherit the land when transgressions, idols, violence and shameful corruption characterised them? No, judgement would overtake them in the very land they claimed to occupy. One inherits the land of promise only by faith. The same applies to professing Christendom. All is in ruins; it acknowledges this, but instead of humbling itself over its own ruin, it claims to inherit the promised blessings. It will inherit only judgement, whilst in the midst of

all this chaos a Remnant according to God will, by faith, become the heir of the promises.

‘Therefore, because of you, Zion shall be ploughed like a field, and Jerusalem shall become heaps of rubble, and the mountain of the house, the high places of a forest’ (v. 12).

This is what all this boasting will lead to. The proof that the Lord is not among them will be delivered to them. Evil will come upon them. The mountain of Zion, where God’s grace had established the kingdom, will be ploughed like a field; the city of the great King will be heaps of rubble; the very seat and dwelling-place of the Lord, the temple, from which God has withdrawn, will be destroyed.

The same shall be true, in a moral sense, of the responsible Church and of all that pertains to a lifeless profession. It shall be vomited out of the Lord’s mouth, then delivered to utter destruction; and even as for its outward prosperity, having become the great Babylon, it shall be burned with fire and swallowed up by the sea.

This important passage from Micah's prophecy against Jerusalem was invoked, as we saw earlier, by the elders in Jeremiah's day to save him, by showing that Hezekiah had accepted this judgement and had not held it against the prophet. Isaiah, for his part, had announced, at the same time, the same things as Micah. He had foretold the total ruin of Jerusalem, adding the promise of a future restoration when 'the Spirit would be poured out from on high upon the people' (Isaiah 32:12–15). We shall see these same promises in chapter 4 of Micah, verses 1–8 of which are closely linked to chapter 3.

Chapter 4: 1–8

The glorious restoration of Jerusalem

'And it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills, and peoples shall stream to it' (v. 1).

This verse follows on from the last verse of the previous chapter (3:12), which speaks of the destroyed house. Here we

see the house rebuilt. Moreover, this entire passage is the counterpart to chapter 3, from which it cannot be separated. As in so many other passages, we see here that the ways of God's government do not end in judgement, but lead to a future time of restoration and glory. Then, at last, the government will be entrusted to hands worthy of it. It is not vengeance on His enemies that glorifies Christ and His work, but reconciliation, the return of all things to God. This reconciliation is based on the blood of the cross, as we see in Colossians 1:20–22. Let us never forget, when prophecy unfolds before us the glorious scene of Christ's future reign on earth, that this scene has the cross as its starting point. It was there that the first act of Christ's victory over Satan took place, and that he who had the power of death was rendered powerless, though not yet broken. He can no longer succeed in his designs, but strives to the very end to snatch the elect from Christ's hands. The second act of Christ's victory over him will be to cast him and his angels down to the earth when the Bride of the Lamb, the glorious Church, is taken into heaven (Rev. 12:7–9). The third act of this victory will take place when, following the defeat of the

nations (Rev. 19:11–16), Satan, bound and cast into the abyss for a thousand years, will be unable to deceive mankind (Rev. 20:1–3). Then the reign of justice and peace will be inaugurated, the result of the successive victories won over the Adversary. Finally, in the last act of the Lamb’s triumph, Satan will be crushed under our feet and cast into the lake of fire and brimstone (Rev. 20:10).

Let us now consider the marvellous description of these times of blessing. At the end of chapter 2, verses 12 and 13, the prophet had announced the future gathering of God’s people. Our passage describes the glorious centre of this people’s government. It will be Mount Zion, where the King of grace, the true David, will be established; then Jerusalem, capital of the King of glory, the true Solomon; and finally the temple, the house where the Lord will cause his name to dwell for ever and which, established on his mountain (‘the mountain of the house’), will form, as we see in Ezekiel (chapters 40–47), the centre of a divine universal monarchy where the Lord himself, Christ the Messiah, will reign over the whole earth. Israel will

be the people closest to this earthly centre, just as the Church will be the closest partner of the heavenly throne.

‘And many nations shall go and say: Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, and to the house of the God of Jacob, and He shall teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths. For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and from Jerusalem the word of the Lord’ (v. 2).

All nations will flock to Jerusalem and will be willing of their own accord to be taught by the God of Israel and to obey him obediently. They will acknowledge his law and submit to his Word. It is from Jerusalem that this Word will go forth during the Millennium (Isaiah 2:3). Today the Church is its custodian, its pillar and its support, but when the Assembly has been caught up in glory, the earthly city and temple will resume their place and privileges here on earth.

‘And he shall judge among the nations, and shall decide for many peoples; and they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift

up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more’
(v. 3).

It will be a reign of justice and righteousness. People will turn their weapons of war into farming tools (Isaiah 2:4). The final effort of the nations, gathered together before the establishment of the kingdom in the Valley of Jehoshaphat, will pursue a goal that is exactly the opposite: ‘Let all the warriors come up! Forge your ploughshares into swords, and your pruning hooks into spears’ (Joel 3:9, 10). They will come up to wage war against Christ and his saints, and Joel describes their judgement. In the times in which we live, a sigh from the whole creation rises unceasingly, longing for the day when ‘they shall no longer learn war’! The reign of peace will also be one of rest and freedom brought about by the glory of the children of God (Rom. 8:19–22).

‘They shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree, and none shall make them afraid: for the mouth of the Lord of hosts has spoken’ (v. 4). Solomon’s reign was a faint foretaste of this: ‘Judah and Israel dwelt then in safety, every man under

his vine and under his fig tree’ (1 Kings 4:25), but when “the man whose name is the Branch... shall sit and reign on his throne”, “everyone shall invite his neighbour to his vine and fig tree” (Zech. 6:12, 13; 3:8–10).

‘For all the nations shall walk, each in the name of their god; but we shall walk in the name of the Lord our God, for ever and ever’ (v. 5). Here the Remnant speaks again. Just as the prophet had announced that, under the guidance of the God of Jacob, the nations ‘shall walk in his ways’ (v. 2), the Remnant declares that he himself shall walk for ever and ever in the name of the Lord his God. He will not be outdone by the nations; he will be eager to proclaim to his people who this God is, who had once revealed himself to him amidst the idolatrous nations. They will have known God only recently, but Israel has known him ever since the Lord brought him into being.

This verse 5 is a comparison; it does not mean that in a future time the peoples will each walk in the name of their god, for then the name of the Lord will be known throughout the earth (Isaiah 2:18–21; Zeph. 3:9); but it indicates that, just as the na-

tions invariably walk in the name of their own god, so Israel will in the future and for ever have the name of the Lord as its banner. It will have done away with the foreign gods that brought about its ruin, to belong henceforth to the Lord alone, who is invariably its God.

Through the mouth of the prophet, in v. 6, the Lord resumes his discourse, interrupted by the joyful exclamation of the faithful Remnant who, having cast aside their idols for ever (5:12–15), have become the true people of God. ‘On that day,’ says the Lord, ‘I will gather the one who limped, and I will bring back the one who was driven away and the one upon whom I had brought disaster. And I will make the one who limped a remnant, and the one who was cast far away a mighty nation; and the Lord will reign over them on Mount Zion from that time forth and for ever’ (vv. 6, 7).

‘On that day.’ He speaks of ‘the end of days’ (4:1), and will return to this in chapter 5:10. Here (vv. 6, 7) the Lord announces, as in chapter 2:12, 13, the future gathering of the flock of Israel, but it is not on the march towards rest, with its king at its

head; rest has been attained, the reign is declared, the kingdom established: ‘The Lord will reign over them on Mount Zion, from now on and for ever.’ Two speakers sing in unison and respond to one another in these verses: on the one hand the Remnant, on the other the prophet who is the mouth of the Lord, and their triumphant stanzas end with this marvellous word: ‘For ever!’

But it is not only the glories of the kingdom that are proclaimed: the mercy and tenderness, all the compassion of the sovereign Shepherd for his lame, rejected, and driven-out sheep—who were once the objects of just punishment—are now revealed. If the Lord had brought evil upon his sheep, was it because he took pleasure in it? The final outcome shows what was in his heart towards them.

What a marvellous picture of the end of days! (vv. 1–8). Divine order is established on earth. Zion, Jerusalem, and the temple are its centre; the law and the word of the Lord are its rule. Peace is firmly established; a delightful rest is enjoyed beneath the vine and the fig tree; the new nation marches in its strength

in the name of the Lord alone, for ever—He Himself reigns over it for ever!

‘And you, O tower of the flock, O high hill of the daughter of Zion, to you shall come and be given the chief dominion—the kingdom, to the daughter of Jerusalem’ (v. 8). Henceforth the flock of the Lord shall be sheltered at the foot of the tower that protects it. This ‘tower of the flock’, Migdal-Eder, is mentioned as being near Bethel in Gen. 35:21; but there is no need to make of it a specific locality. It is a symbol of Jerusalem, a place of protection around which the flock of Israel gathers (2 Chron. 26:9, 10); an elevated place overlooking the land (Zech. 14:10, 11). The ‘former dominion’, the kingdom of old, that of the son of Jesse, will return to the daughter of Jerusalem, to the Remnant, once weak and lame, but now recognised as the strong nation, under the sceptre of the true David, to whom the kingdom will belong; but his Jewish bride will share the reign with Him, whilst the New Jerusalem, his heavenly bride, will have a far greater share than Israel, and will be associated with both the heavenly and earthly reign of her Bridegroom.

CHAPTERS 4:9 to CH. 5

Babylon and Assyria. Double judgement, present and future, upon Jerusalem, and the final restoration of the people

Chapter 4: 9–13

Babylon and the nations

Following the description of the glorious future blessing (vv. 6–8), the prophet, speaking again, addresses Jerusalem. He shows what has completely thwarted God's gracious purposes towards his people, but also that God will deliver Israel from this wretched state and restore it. Two major instruments of his judgement are mentioned here: Babylon (chap. 4:9–13) and Assyria (chap. 5:1–6). The moral ruin of the monarchy (4:9) and the rejection of the Messiah are the two causes of these plagues unleashed against the people (5:1). The absence of a king and of a counsellor marks the end of Judah's history. It is then that God pronounces the Lo-Ammi, turns his face away from Israel, rejects it completely, and entrusts the government to Babylon,

the ‘head of gold’ of the first universal empire of the Gentiles. The rejection of the Messiah marks the division of Judah, whom God had brought back from captivity to await the coming of their King in their own land. As a consequence of this crime, Jerusalem is trampled underfoot by the nations; this state of affairs continues to this day and has never ceased. But a time will come when the Lord will renew His relationship with the faithful remnant, whom He will call His people. It is then that the final enemy, the Assyrian, will reappear to be destroyed once and for all.

Let us examine this passage in some detail: ‘Now, why do you cry out? Is there no king among you? Has your counsellor perished? For distress has seized you, like a woman in labour. Be in anguish and groan, O daughter of Zion, like a woman in labour; for now you shall go out of the city, and you shall dwell in the fields, and you shall come as far as Babylon; there you shall be delivered; there the Lord shall redeem you from the hand of your enemies’ (vv. 9, 10). The word ‘now’ is noteworthy throughout this passage. We find it in vv. 9, 10, 11 and in ch. 5:1, 4. It takes current events as its starting point and ex-

tends, seemingly without interruption or transition, into future events (compare v. 9 with v. 11, then 5:1 with v. 4). The prophet Micah, like almost all prophecy, sees in the things to come a repetition of past events, which are merely their faint forerunners. The daughter of Zion is in anguish and cries out like a woman in labour. What will she bring forth? What will come of her pains? The guilty kingdom is to be destroyed; the people, driven out of the city, will dwell in the fields, defenceless, and will go as far as Babylon. Here we find the captivity of Jerusalem and Judah under Nebuchadnezzar in Babylon. She will be delivered and redeemed from the hand of her enemies. This is the announcement of the return of the Jews to Palestine, under the reign of Cyrus.

But their story does not end there. The ‘now’ continues into a future day: ‘And now many nations are gathered against you, saying: “Let her be defiled; let our eyes see Zion!”’ (v. 11). It is from this attack that the Lord will deliver Jerusalem. At present she is not delivered and had been so only momentarily under Hezekiah. Since Nebuchadnezzar she continues, even today, to be trampled underfoot by the nations. In a future day she will

no longer be so; on the contrary, it is she who will trample them underfoot. ‘They do not know the thoughts of the Lord, nor do they understand his counsel; for he has gathered them together like sheaves on the threshing floor. Arise and tread, O daughter of Zion, for I will make your horn of iron, and I will make your hooves of bronze, and you shall crush many peoples’ (vv. 12, 13).

We thus come to a second phase in the history of Jerusalem, which follows not only its capture by Babylon, but its deliverance and restoration under Cyrus. ‘Many nations’ are now gathered against her. Prophecy continually foretells this future event (see, for example, Isaiah 17:12–14; Joel 3:9–12; Obadiah 15, 16; Zechariah 12:1–5; Psalm 83:4–8). In the end times, all the nations will gather against Jerusalem to desecrate it, but they ‘do not understand the counsel of the Lord’. Jerusalem will become a cup of staggering for all the nations that come up against her, intending to destroy her, and who will themselves be destroyed (Zech. 12:2, 9). They do not see that God, in His counsels, has consigned them to irremediable ruin. ‘He has gathered them together like sheaves on the threshing floor’ (v.

12). The daughter of Zion, who, by God's grace, will have restored her relationship with Him—true Israel, of whom the Lord 'has made a remnant' (4:7), Jerusalem will rise up with the strength her God will give her to trample and crush many peoples; she will be a warhorse, with an iron horn on her forehead and hooves of bronze. We have seen in Obadiah that, on the one hand, the people of God, and on the other, the Lord Himself, take part in this battle.

'And I will consecrate their spoil to the Lord, and their possessions to the Lord of all the earth' (v. 13).

Here the Remnant speaks again, a touching communion of thought and affection between the people and their God. As in former times under Joshua, or later under David, all the spoils will be consecrated to the Lord who has led his people to victory.

Chapter 5 will tell us of the second power that will take part in the conflict of the end, of that prophetic Assyrian who, as we have seen, is the principal enemy in the book of Micah.

Chapter 5

The Assyrian and the Victory of the Remnant of Israel

At the end of chapter 4, the focus is less on the siege of Jerusalem itself than on the battle waged outside its walls by the Lord and his people against the assembled nations, although Jerusalem remains the centre of all their efforts. Other passages (Obadiah, Isaiah 63) tell us that the final clash and the defeat of the nations will take place in Edom.

However, a final enemy emerges. It is not the universal empire entrusted to the nations, of which Babylon is the head, and which is then destroyed at the end of chapter 4 in its final satanic incarnation, the resurrected Roman Empire. No, it is the Assyrian, the enemy of the last day, who, as we have said, plays the leading role in Micah, either as the historical Assyrian before the Lord abandoned his people, or as the prophetic Assyrian at the moment when God restores his relationship with Israel. We see him enter the scene in our chapter.

‘Now gather yourself together, O daughter of the host’ (v. 1). This ‘daughter of the host’ is contrasted with the ‘daughter of Zion’ (4:10, 13). She is called by the Lord to gather her forces. She knows no more of ‘the thoughts and counsel of God’ than the other nations gathered by the Lord (4:12). This daughter of the host is, as verse 5 tells us, the Assyrian driven by his blindness to lay siege to Jerusalem. Thus we see the prophetic Assyrian reappear, bearing the characteristics of the historical Assyrian, as also attested by the prophets Isaiah, Joel, Nahum and others.

The reason for this invasion is given to us by Micah. It is a judgement upon Israel because of the way it has treated its Judge, its Messiah and its King. ‘They strike the Judge of Israel with a rod on the cheek’ (v. 1). The contempt and hatred of the unbelieving people of old towards Christ is the cause of this Last Day judgement, but the purpose of this judgement is to bring about complete repentance in the hearts and consciences of the Remnant, as seen in Zech. 12:8–14.

Let us note the speakers in this v. 1. First, the voice of the Lord, having gathered the nations in chap. 4:11, now calls upon the Assyrians to assemble. After that, the Remnant speaks: ‘He has laid siege against us.’ He acknowledges that this judgement comes from the Lord. Then the prophet explains the cause of this judgement: ‘They strike the Judge of Israel with a rod on the cheek.’ Isaiah also presents to us the causes of God’s judgement on Israel. First, idolatry (40–48), then, as here, the rejection of the Messiah (49–57).

In v. 2 the Lord speaks, in a delightful and gracious aside (*), of what He had intended to do for Israel by giving them a King after His own heart: ‘(And you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you shall come for Me One who is to rule in Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times)’

(*) The widely accepted translation which begins the fifth chapter at verse 2 seems to us to indicate a real lack of understanding of this entire passage.

The chief priests and the scribes had quoted this saying to Herod when he asked them where the Christ was to be born (Matt. 2:3–6). But why ‘Bethlehem Ephrathah’ instead of ‘Bethlehem, land of Judah’, as in Matthew’s account? I believe that the Spirit of God here directs our thoughts to the birth of Benjamin and the death of Rachel (Gen. 35:16–19; 48:7). Benjamin is the ‘son of the right hand’ of his father (Gen. 35:18), just as he is the Beloved of the Lord (Deut. 33:12). Bethlehem is ‘small among the thousands of Judah’. It pleased God to choose this humble and unassuming village to bring forth the Ruler. God thus removed from man any claim to glory; moreover, it was the city of David (Luke 2:4); so the true David had to be born there. But God has yet another reason for naming this place Bethlehem Ephrathah. It is there that death overtakes Jacob’s chosen wife; it is therefore, symbolically, when all hope of life is lost for Israel that Christ arises. ‘Out of you shall come forth for me the one who is to rule over Israel’ ‘For me’; God speaks here. His counsels are fulfilled in this man who not only brings blessing to the people, but causes the glory of God to shine forth. Never before had such a thing

happened. Neither David nor Solomon, fallible men, could have been, without reservation, men after God's own heart. He could only be satisfied with the Ruler who would come forth for Him, the very one who would have reigned over Israel, had the latter been willing to receive him. But what did his people do? They rejected him, heaped scorn upon him, struck him with rods, spat upon him and struck him with blows. And yet 'his origins were from of old, from the days of eternity!' (v. 2; Isa. 9:6). Is this not the absolute condemnation of man? The Assyrian's final attack is vengeance taken against Jerusalem for such contempt of God!

'Therefore he will deliver them until the time when she who is in labour has given birth' (v. 3).

Here the prophet resumes his speech, interrupted by the Lord in v. 2. The 'Therefore' of v. 3 relates to the words: 'They strike the Judge of Israel with a rod on the cheek'. In the face of all the divine grace that gave Christ as King to Israel, the people—and particularly Jerusalem, the main subject of Micah's prophecy—had committed this appalling act. That is why retribution

for such a crime must take place. Israel will be delivered by the Lord until the time of the birth. Instead of being gathered, as it ought to have been, by the coming of the Messiah, it will be delivered until all the travail of its anguish and tribulation has come to an end. This refers less to the fruit of the birth (see 4:9, 10) than to the pains and distress of Israel, when they have been brought to an end (*). ‘He will deliver them’; it is God who delivers them until the tribulation is over.

(*) I believe this must be the meaning. If one were to consider the product of childbirth, one might cite not Rev. 12:4, 5, where the Israel of God’s counsel gives birth to the ‘male child’, Christ and the Church, whose rapture to heaven brings the present age to an end; but rather the ‘Remnant of the woman’s seed’ (Rev. 12:17).

‘And the rest of her brethren shall return to the children of Israel’ (v. 3). This remnant had been delivered from the captivity of Babylon under Cyrus (4:10), but, instead of receiving the Messiah, for whose sake they were brought back to their own land, they struck him on the cheek, as we have seen, and by virtue of this sin, they returned to the dispersion among ‘the

sons of Israel'. Like the ten tribes, they returned to captivity among the nations.

It was not the same at the beginning of the parenthesis with which the history of the Church opens and which closes here on earth at the coming of the Lord. The Remnant of Israel, the remnant of Christ's brethren, came to the Church to be part of it; 'those who were to be saved', the term used for the Remnant, were added to the Assembly (Acts 2:47), instead of being scattered again as were those carried away to Babylon following the murder of the Son of God.

'And he shall stand and feed his flock with the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God. And they shall dwell in safety, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth. And to him shall be peace' (v. 4).

It is no longer merely, as in chapter 4:8, the kingdom returning to the daughter of Jerusalem; for the prophet here describes to us the person of the King, the Shepherd of Israel. After judgement has been executed upon Jerusalem, the Judge once scorned, He whose origins are eternal, will stand there and feed

his flock. ‘From God,’ says Jacob, ‘is the Shepherd, the Rock of Israel’ (Gen. 49:25). This Christ, once scorned, will stand there in the strength (*) and majesty of the Lord, as the ‘Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace’ (Isaiah 9:6). For what, indeed, is more peaceful than a Shepherd tending his flock? But this peaceful task will be fulfilled by Him who, from now on, will be great to the ends of the earth. ‘He shall be peace.’ A picture, at once restful and majestic, of that millennial period when, over the delivered nation and to the ends of the earth, the peaceful and sovereign countenance of the Man who was once crushed to accomplish the work of Redemption—now sovereignly exalted, whilst remaining the faithful Shepherd of His sheep and the servant of His beloved—will shine forth. We too shall partake of this eternal service of love in glory, but as for them, ‘the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them’, as it is written in Rev. 7:17.

(*) This word characterises divine power itself, a power which belongs in the same way to Christ (Ps. 110:2) and in which all the saints of his people find their strength.

After verse 4 has given a magnificent description of the glorious figure to whom the care of the flock will be entrusted, verses 5 to 9 tell us about the characteristics of the flock itself, the ‘Remnant of Jacob’, which speaks in verse 5:

‘When the Assyrian enters our land, and when he sets foot in our palaces, we will set against him seven shepherds and eight princes of men. And they will ravage the land of Assyria with the sword, and the land of Nimrod within its gates.’

Christ himself is the Deliverer when the Assyrian enters ‘our land’ (that is, that of the Remnant, of true Israel). But he employs instruments of his power, a multitude of shepherds (seven) and princes (eight), in relation to his earthly government (four + four). These are the ‘saviours’ of Obadiah 21. They ravage the land of Assyria. I have suggested elsewhere (*) that this invasion of Assyria could be the cause of the Assyrian’s return, during his campaign in Egypt, when ‘news from the East and the North will terrify him’ (Dan. 11:44).

(*) *The Prophetic History of the Last Days*, by H. R.

‘And he (the Messiah) will deliver us from the Assyrian, when he enters our land and sets foot within our borders’ (v. 6).

We are now witnessing this final destruction of the Assyrian by the Lord Himself, mentioned in Dan. 11:45 and foretold by Isaiah, Ezekiel, Joel and other prophets.

‘And the remnant of Jacob shall be, in the midst of many peoples, like dew from the Lord, like showers upon the grass—which does not wait for man, nor depend on the sons of men’ (v. 7).

Such is the first characteristic of the Remnant under Christ’s sceptre. It will bear the traits of Him who has set Himself at its head (2 Sam. 23:4; Prov. 16:15; 19:12; Hosea 14:5); it will be like dew that requires no effort; a pure fruit of grace that does not wait for man, nor depend on the sons of men. Such will be the dawn of the millennium, and this Remnant of which it is spoken. ‘From the womb of the dawn shall come to thee the dew of thy youth’ (Ps. 110:3). Every blessing shall flow from the heavenly King who will come to manifest his presence in

the midst of his people; it shall be the portion of Israel, in communion with its Head.

‘And the Remnant of Jacob shall be, among the nations, in the midst of many peoples, like a lion among the beasts of the forest, like a young lion among flocks of sheep, which, when it passes through, tramples and tears in pieces, and there is none to deliver’ (v. 8).

Such is the second characteristic of the Remnant of Jacob. Judah, the royal tribe, is at its head, which is implied by the name Jacob, as we have often noted. It is of Judah that it is said: ‘Judah is a young lion; you have gone up from the prey, my son. He crouches, he lies down like a lion, and like a lioness; who will rouse him?’ (Gen. 49:9, 10). But Judah bears above all the character of his Head, who is Christ. It is He who is called ‘the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David’ (Rev. 5:5). Just as He imparts His grace to those of His race, so He imparts His strength to them, and it is through Him that the Remnant will subdue the nations and reign ‘among the beasts of the forest’.

In v. 9, the Remnant addresses the Lord Himself: ‘Your hand will be raised against your adversaries, and all your enemies will be cut off.’ He gives glory to Christ alone, attributing to himself no virtue in overcoming that which rises up against his King, but grace and strength are imparted to him by the adorable Head to whom he belongs for ever. Thus the Remnant has learnt, through the path of humiliation, to place no confidence in himself and to attribute to the Lord all the good that is produced. Compare what God says of the Remnant in vv. 7 and 8 with what the Remnant thinks of himself in Ezra 9:5–15. In these circumstances, God makes known, through the mouth of the prophet, to the ‘remnant of the survivors’ that He wishes to make them the vessel of His grace and power. The Remnant responds (v. 9) by attributing all the glory to their Lord and their God.

In verses 10 to 15 the Lord speaks. He will cut off from the midst of the apostate people the military apparatus, the cities and the fortresses, the strongholds of the Antichrist (Dan. 11:39). All this power will be reduced to nothing, along with its enchantments and idols (vv. 10–14). At the same time (v. 15),

the wrath and fury of the Lord will fall upon the nations with which the unbelieving people had assimilated and whose apostasy they had shared. Thus the reign of peace will be established through judgement. The Lord begins by exercising judgement upon his own house, then extends it to the world and the apostate nation, but all this with a view to the final blessing of his people and the establishment of the glorious kingdom of Christ.

CHAPTERS 6 and 7

The Plea

Here we come to the fourth and final section of the book of Micah. Chapters 6 and 7 contain God's plea with his people, aimed at bringing them to complete moral deliverance; they are like the questions of an investigating judge who wishes to find the accused not guilty, and the latter's answers. His own confessions convict him of sin, and yet the debate ends with the acquittal of the guilty party and his complete vindication! This

is certainly not how proceedings before human courts come to an end.

With chapter 5, the prophetic events proper have come to an end. Here the debate is aimed at the work of conscience, the horror of sin, repentance, restoration and the full knowledge of grace. Under the powerful influence of the Spirit of God, this work is accomplished in the heart of the Remnant, so that he accepts the Lord's judgement upon himself and his people, and entrusts himself entirely to the grace (7:18) which he had so outrageously disregarded at the beginning of his career (6:1–5).

It is worth noting how much these chapters resemble the first chapter of Isaiah. The same plea, the same conclusions, with this difference, however, that Micah continues, as usual, to give the floor to the various speakers on the scene, and that the plea which concludes his prophecy ends with the acquittal of the guilty party and not, as in Isaiah, with his condemnation. The whole of the ensuing debate is of profound practical interest to us: grace presented before reproach, the effect it produces in a heart led to accuse itself, to condemn itself, and to find its

tribulation just and deserved—all this ultimately leads to a full appreciation of God’s love, which banishes sin from His presence forever!

Chapter 6

‘Hear, I pray you, what the Lord says’ (v. 1). Here the prophet is the mouthpiece of God; from the outset, one senses that God’s purpose is one of grace. He addresses his people and urges them to listen. How different was the call to listen in the first chapter (v. 2). There, the kingdoms of Israel and Judah, as well as the nations and peoples (in Isaiah 1, the heavens and the earth), were invited to hear the irrevocable judgement pronounced upon them by a just and holy God. Here the Lord has His own, the true Israel, the people of His choice, in mind, to purify them and bring them into the inheritance that had been promised to them from of old. It is a matter for the Remnant (this is important, and who would not feel it?) to listen to what the Lord has to say to them, for this is the only way for them to find deliverance.

‘Arise, plead your case before the mountains, and let the hills hear your voice! Listen, O mountains, to the Lord’s case, and you, the immovable foundations of the earth, for the Lord has a case against his people, and he is in dispute with Israel’ (vv. 1, 2).

First, the guilty party must listen before the mountains, before the powers firmly established on the earth, capable of being sure and unchanging witnesses, and before the immutable foundations of the earth. These witnesses are themselves called upon to listen to the word of the Lord and then to judge what the guilty party may say in his defence. They are like the jury in this court of assizes, called upon to assess matters, not as heaven might do, but by considering them according to the well-established measure of equity in an earthly judgement. God still calls Israel his people here, for He has not yet definitively rejected them. But can this last for ever?

‘My people, what have I done to you, and in what way have I wearied you? Answer me! For I brought you up out of the land of Egypt, and I redeemed you from the house of bondage; and I

sent before you Moses, Aaron and Miriam. ‘My people, please remember the plan that Balak, king of Moab, devised, and what Balaam, son of Beor, replied to him, from Shittim to Gilgal, so that you may know the righteousness of the Lord’ (vv. 3–5).

What gentleness there is in this rebuke! Can we not sense that God desires only good for Israel? What have I done to you? And in what way have I wearied you? Answer me. Ah! how ready the Judge is to find extenuating circumstances for their conduct! But how could any be found, when, on His part, everything had been grace and mercy, before the law intervened to reveal what was in their hearts? For redemption was the foundation of all His dealings with them! ‘I brought you up out of the land of Egypt, and I redeemed you from the house of bondage.’ Had they lacked spiritual help from the very beginning, in the wilderness? The leader and king of Jeshurun, the mediator between the people and the Lord, Moses—the priesthood, Aaron—prophecy, Miriam—met all their needs, even their material ones. And at the end of the wilderness, when the Enemy sought to curse them, what did this people—who had so tried God’s patience—find? A God who blessed them

through the very mouth of the one who sought to curse them, a God who declared that He had found no iniquity in Jacob, and who found His delight on earth in this people whom He had chosen: ‘How beautiful are your tents, O Jacob!’ And in what way had the righteous ways of the Lord been manifested, after He had revealed His grace to them? No more at Shittim than at Gilgal had He denied His justice. Would He have been the Lord without that? At Shittim, He had chastised them for their fornication and their forgetfulness of His holiness. At Gilgal He had taught them that only the circumcision of the flesh could bring them into the enjoyment of the promised land.

In verses 6 and 7 we find the response of the believers among the people, before whom God has just displayed all his goodness—yet a goodness that cannot disregard his holiness. ‘With what shall I draw near to the Lord, and bow down before the God on high? Shall I draw near to him with burnt offerings, with year-old calves? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I give my first-born for my transgression, the fruit of my womb for the sin of my soul?’

Confronted in this way, they feel that their sin separates them from God. This is the first step towards conversion. But how can they draw near to Him? None of the sacrifices prescribed by the law can in any way satisfy Him, and the heart, convinced of sin, feels this keenly. This is what God Himself calls ‘vain offerings’ in the corresponding passage in Isaiah (1:11–15). The same applies to the offering of the firstborn, instituted after the exodus from Egypt. This offering (Ex. 13:1–2, 10–13) was a consecration to God, in the sense of the complete devotion of the whole person to the Lord. Could this be accomplished by a sinful man? No more than the sacrifices could the offering of the firstborn purify them. Through this first confession, God will penetrate further into the conscience of His people, or, to put it more accurately, into the conscience of the Remnant.

In v. 8 the prophet responds to the people in accordance with God’s holy requirements and on the basis of their own individual responsibility: ‘He has shown you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you, but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?’ God de-

sires the heart of man, not empty forms or ceremonies. We find the same thought in Isaiah 1:16–17: ‘Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your deeds from before my eyes; cease to do evil; learn to do good; seek justice, bring relief to the oppressed; defend the orphan, plead the widow’s cause’. This separates the soul from all those empty forms which cannot take away sins, in order to bring it to an awareness of its state before God. To be accepted by Him, on the basis of man’s responsibility, only three things are required, which exclude all outward appearance and demand a genuine state of the heart, in harmony with the heart of God. These three things are: 1. To do what is right — activity in the ‘works of righteousness’; 2. To love goodness — the state of a heart that takes pleasure in what is good; 3. To walk with God in humility, free from all pride, for to walk with God is to be His companion, like Enoch, in humble dependence on Him.

Such are the ‘precepts’, the rules and teachings that God recommends to us. But how can we follow them except by faith? Through faith we do the works; through faith we delight in reflecting the character of the God of love who has revealed

Himself to us in Christ; through faith we walk with God. The law demands these things, but cannot produce them in the heart of man; the latter is thereby only more utterly condemned, for he is powerless to meet the demands of God's holiness. This is what we see in Isaiah 1:16, 17, where there is no mention, as in the last two chapters of Micah, of the restoration of the Remnant (though it is named in v. 9), but of the absolute judgement of the people who do not cease to do evil, who 'do not do justice to the orphan, and before whom the widow's cause has no access' (v. 23; cf. v. 17). The same applies to the cleansing of their sins which God offers them in v. 18. It is presented to them, but they refuse. — The prophecy of Micah is quite different, where, as we see, God continues His work of grace in the conscience of the Remnant, to bring them to complete restoration.

In verses 9 to 11, the Lord speaks again through the mouth of his prophet. It is to make himself heard that God uses the rod: 'Listen to the rod and to Him who decreed it,' he cries out to the city. This city is Samaria, where 'the statutes of Omri and all the works of the house of Ahab' are observed (v. 16). The

prophet returns to what he announced at the beginning ‘concerning Samaria and Jerusalem’ (1:1). He addresses the second of these cities in the following chapter (7:11–17). Have God’s warnings through his prophets succeeded in banishing false weights and measures, violence and deceit from the houses of Samaria? (see Amos 3:9, 10). Because of this, judgement will overtake it. All its efforts to survive, to preserve, to reap fruit, will be in vain, for, instead of observing the statutes of the Lord, it walks according to the idolatrous counsel of Omri and Ahab, during whose reign another Micaiah had prophesied (1 Kings 22). Thus God responds to the people on the basis of their responsibility, when it has been shown to them that it is impossible for them to fulfil it.

This chapter is a beautiful appeal to the conscience. God begins by speaking of his grace. The heart is convinced that it has no means of responding to it, being separated from God. Then God makes known the moral standard he demands, and to which, however desirable it may be, man cannot respond because of the state of his heart. Faith alone could bring these things to pass. Thereupon God causes the troubled soul to wit-

ness His righteous judgement upon the city and the unfaithful people who dwell therein. If God were to stop there, there would be no further recourse for the Remnant; but we shall see in Chapter 7 that the result of all this work is to bring the soul of believers to a full judgement of itself, to produce repentance, and finally to establish the heart in the full enjoyment of grace.

Chapter 7

Far from being concluded by the pronouncement of the sentence on Samaria, the proceedings continue concerning Jerusalem and Judah; but, what matters most of all, their aim is the full blessing of the Remnant who will form the new Israel. In this chapter we see where the plea leads when faith is in the heart and, realising God's righteous judgement and 'heeding the rod' (6:9), the soul understands that it is without recourse.

'Woe is me! For I am like one who has gathered the summer fruits, like gleanings at the grape harvest: not a single bunch of grapes to eat! No early fruit that my soul desired!' (v. 1).

As we mentioned earlier, there are two ‘Woe’ passages in Micah (2:1; 7:1): the first comprising the six ‘Woe’s’ of Isaiah 5, the second (chap. 7:1) corresponding to that which Isaiah pronounces upon himself, when his eyes beheld the King, the Lord of hosts (Isaiah 6:5). So too in Micah, the prophet, representing the Remnant, convinced of sin and acknowledging God’s righteous judgement, pronounces judgement upon himself. In Isaiah chapter 5, the Lord seeks fruit in his vineyard; he expected Israel to produce good grapes, but finds only wild vines. Here it is the Remnant who acknowledges being fruitless under God’s judgement; and though he had hoped that something might be found in him for God, even that hope is taken from him. The Lord seems to take no account of his faith and integrity, since, overwhelmed by God’s wrath, he is as it were lumped together with the guilty people, and left there, stripped bare, without food, joy, or refreshment for his soul. Then he takes a thorough look at himself. He desired to bear early fruit for God and has produced none! For the moment, the Lord does not show his favour to the Remnant, who must go through the terrible trials of the great tribulation; but when the judge-

ment has borne all its fruit, he will establish him in that favour according to the greatness of his mercy.

In v. 1 the soul began by judging itself; in vv. 2–6 it realises the estrangement from God in which the world around it finds itself. This chapter leaves Samaria to give a dreadful description of the evil found in Jerusalem:

‘The godly have vanished from the land, and there are no upright men among mankind; all lie in wait to shed blood; each hunts his brother with a net; both hands are ready for evil, to do it well’ (vv. 2, 3).

Nothing to rely on, no godliness that God recognises! All this has vanished. The wicked employ both their hands, all their activity, for evil, so as to do it well and succeed completely in their wicked designs. Is this not also evident in our own day? All human foresight is brought into play, no avenue of activity is neglected, in order to accomplish evil as perfectly as possible. ‘It is difficult,’ said a Christian, ‘to do good, and even more difficult to do it well’; but Satan always finds hands ready to do evil well. Men join forces, becoming one for this evil

work; the prince uses his authority to commit acts of oppression; the judge does not uphold the claims of the oppressed, because he is paid to do evil; the great man gives vent to the greed of his soul. These three powers work together in concert to achieve their single goal (v. 3). ‘The best of them is like a bramble, the most upright, worse than a hedge of thorns’ (v. 4). Only the fire of judgement is reserved for them, as it is said: ‘The light of Israel will be a fire, and his Holy One a flame; and it will burn and devour his thorns and brambles in a single day’ (Isaiah 10:17).

In chapter 5, verse 10, the Lord foretold that the day of judgement would come; now it has arrived: ‘The day of your watchmen and of your visitation has come; now shall their confusion be’ (v. 4). It is the prophet who declares this. The moral state in Israel has become so bad that no one can be trusted: ‘Do not put your trust in a companion; do not rely on a friend; guard the doors of your mouth even from the one who lies in your bosom’ (v. 5). The believer is isolated, can no longer walk in harmony with a companion, has no friend to whom he can say everything, no bosom in which he can pour out his heart in

confidence. The presence of the light only stirs up opposition from men and incites them to struggle to extinguish this brightness. ‘For the son dishonours his father, the daughter rises up against her mother, the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; a man’s enemies are the members of his own household’ (v. 6). The Lord uses this passage (Matt. 10:34–36) to show the results of His gracious presence in the midst of Israel. Once God’s testimony is rejected, all the natural bonds that still united people are broken, giving free rein to hatred—hatred that is first directed against the witnesses of Christ: “A man’s enemies will be the members of his own household.” When these bonds are broken, it is like a torrent that has burst its banks and devastates everything in its path. People do not then confine themselves to hating God; they hate their neighbour. Love has vanished from the heart as soon as the love of God is driven out; Satan immediately comes to fill it with his own nature, which is hatred.

‘But as for me, I will look to the Lord; I will wait for the God of my salvation; my God will hear me’ (v. 7). Now note these words from the believer’s mouth. He said: ‘Woe is me!’ Then

he judged the world; then he learnt that he could trust the world no more than he could trust himself; then he realised that here on earth he could find nothing but hostility towards what is of God. What, then, remains for him? God alone. He looks to God, waits for Him, cries out and finds a God who hears him. Will he be unhappy from now on? Certainly not! He brought misfortune upon himself when he had to concern himself with his own condition; but there is nothing left for him but happiness and trust when he looks to God. This transition from misfortune to joy, from self-knowledge to the knowledge of God, is most beautiful. Even though the best of men is a thornbush and the most upright worse than a hedge of thorns—a truth that applies just as well to the believer—his heart despairs of man, but his faith despairs not at all of God: ‘He is the God of my salvation; my God will hear me!’

‘Do not rejoice over me, my enemy: if I fall, I will rise again; if I sit in darkness, the Lord will be my light. I will bear the Lord’s indignation, for I have sinned against him, — until he takes up my cause and vindicates me: he will bring me out into the light; I shall see his righteousness. And my enemy shall see

it, and shame shall cover her, she who said to me, ‘Where is the Lord your God?’ My eyes shall see her now; she shall be trampled like the mud of the streets” (vv. 8–10).

The soul that has learnt to trust in God does not doubt its final salvation. It is assured that its fall was, in God’s hands, merely the occasion for its restoration. It knows that though the darkness of tribulation now surrounds it, the Lord will be its light when he appears (Isaiah 9:2; 50:10). It understands that the dreadful sin with which it is associated—since its people struck the Judge of Israel with a rod upon the cheek—has deserved judgement; it is therefore just that it should bear the divine wrath, but it also knows that a time will come when the Lord will take its cause into His own hands. Then He will bring forth into the light the Remnant who were in the darkness of tribulation and distress, but who, in that darkness, had the Lord as their light. During the deep night, the light will be in the hearts of the faithful, just as today, in ours, the morning star; only the darkness into which the Remnant will be plunged will be God’s judgement, whilst Christians, being not of the night but children of the day, do not in any way belong to the darkness, even

as they pass through it. This cannot be said of the Remnant until it has attained full deliverance. Then its enemy—which is certainly here the apostate nation rather than the idolatrous nations, and which said to the Remnant in its distress: ‘Where is the Lord your God?’ (an insult that characterises the great tribulation in the prophetic writings), her enemy, I say, will be covered with shame when she witnesses the Lord’s open intervention on behalf of his people. She will be ‘trampled like the mud of the streets’. We learn, indeed, from Isaiah 10:6, that this judgement upon the ‘godless nation’ will be carried out by the Assyrian, the rod of the Lord’s wrath, and that he will ‘trample her underfoot like the mud of the streets’.

In verses 11–13, the Lord speaks again, addressing Jerusalem, the city of his choice. He speaks to her of a future day when her walls will be rebuilt and the boundaries of her enclosure extended. Then Egypt and Assyria will come to her, and her borders will extend from Egypt to the Euphrates and from one sea to the other. Then also the word of Isaiah will be fulfilled: ‘In that day there shall be a highway from Egypt to Assyria; and Assyria shall come into Egypt, and Egypt into Assyria; and

Egypt shall serve with Assyria. On that day Israel will be the third, together with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the earth; for the Lord of hosts will bless them, saying: ‘Blessed be Egypt, my people, and Assyria, the work of my hands, and Israel, my inheritance’ (19:23–25).

But it is important to note that before this final restoration, ‘this land will be a desolation because of its inhabitants, for the fruit of their deeds’ (v. 13). This refers, as the entire course of this prophecy teaches us, to the prophetic Assyrian who, before attacking the king of the South, will sweep through the land of Israel, reducing it to desolation, like a torrent that overflows.

Then the faithful cry out: ‘Feed your people with your staff, the flock of your inheritance that dwells alone in the forest, in the midst of Carmel; let them graze in Bashan and Gilead as in days of old’ (v. 14). Beyond the judgement they are undergoing, the Remnant longs for the future blessing, but, during the tribulation, they already enjoy the care of the Shepherd of Israel; they feel his presence with them as they pass through the dark valley, where contact with the Shepherd’s rod reassures

them: ‘Your rod and your staff, they comfort me’ (Ps. 23:4). The flock of his inheritance, this suffering and despised Remnant, is called his people, and whilst awaiting the time when he will possess them upon entering his glorious kingdom, he will shepherd them in the solitude of Carmel, in the hidden retreat of the prophets, the place where the people were restored to the worship of the Lord, where Elijah’s enemies, destroyed by fire from heaven, could not lay a hand on him, and from where Elisha set out to raise the Shunammite’s son. How this symbolic place will serve to encourage the ‘flock of the inheritance’ in those days—now shortened—which will precede the final deliverance, when the sheep will graze in Bashan and Gilead, in the lush pastures as in days of old! Already this deliverance is at the door; after the destruction of the Beast and the false prophet, there remains but one last enemy, the Assyrian. Until he ‘comes to an end, with no one to help him’ (Dan. 11:45), the Lord says: ‘My people shall dwell in a place of peace and in secure dwellings, and in quiet resting places’ (Isaiah 32:18).

In verses 15–17, the Lord speaks again: ‘As in the days when you came out of the land of Egypt, I will show him marvellous things. The nations will see and be confounded because of all their might; they will put their hands over their mouths, their ears will be deaf. They will lick the dust like a serpent; like the creeping things of the earth, they will come trembling out of their hiding places; they will come in fear to the Lord our God, and they will fear you’ (vv. 15–17).

Here God recalls the day when He brought His people out of Egypt. Then it was the whole people; now He sees them represented only by the Remnant. The deliverance will be as marvellous for them as it was for Israel when they came out of Egypt. The Assyrian will be defeated as Pharaoh was of old, and will be destroyed between two seas, as Pharaoh was in the Red Sea. Upon hearing this news, the nations, like the peoples of Canaan of old, will lose all courage and their hearts will melt (Joshua 2:11).

‘They shall lick the dust like a serpent,’ says the Remnant. This verse corresponds to Psalm 18:44, 45, where the Messiah

speaks thus: ‘The sons of the stranger have submitted to me in pretence. The sons of the stranger have withered away, and they have come out trembling from their hiding places.’ Under a pretence of obedience, their hearts will not be changed; they will submit only outwardly to a power which they will be unable to resist, and which, at the slightest sign of rebellion, ‘will shatter them with a rod of iron, like a potter’s vessel’ (Ps. 2:9). Their final revolt following the glorious reign of a thousand years (Rev. 20:7–10) will prove that they had submitted only to force. Their hearts, tested by glory as they were once by grace, will not have been changed. Here it expresses fear rather than dissimulation, as mentioned in Ps. 18, but one always accompanies the other when the heart lacks righteousness. It goes without saying that ‘the great multitude which no man can number’ and which, during the Millennium, will constitute the saved from among the nations (Rev. 7:9) is not included among those of whom this passage speaks.

Verses 18–20. We have seen the Remnant led, from the first stirrings of conscience (6:6), through repentance and self-judgement (7:1) to full trust in God (7:7) and to the acceptance

of the trial as the consequence of their sin against Christ (7:9), but they have the certainty, amidst the isolation in which God keeps them and the judgments that are raging, that the care of the Shepherd of Israel will not fail them (7:14). Receiving at the same time from the mouth of the Messiah the assurance of his restoration and of a period of peace that will follow the desolation of the land (7:9, 15), he rejoices in anticipation of seeing the nations subjected to the sceptre of his King (7:17).

The day of deliverance is about to dawn: we hear the song of triumph sung in turn by the Remnant and by the prophet who, in the affliction of this long trial, had exhorted, comforted and encouraged them in hope.

‘Who is a God like you, who pardons iniquity and passes over the transgression of the remnant of his inheritance?’ (v. 18). The Remnant describes itself here as ‘the remnant of his inheritance’. The apostate nation has just received the reward of its iniquity. What joy for the faithful to know they are forgiven! This happiness can only be fully appreciated and savoured by hearts that have felt the full weight of their guilt before God.

Forgiveness! The complete forgetting of their transgression!
How they are set free in His presence!

‘He will not retain his anger for ever, for he delights in kindness’ (v. 18). Here I believe I hear the voice of the prophet joining in this hymn of thanksgiving. Before Israel’s full restoration to its land, deliverance is already proclaimed. The Lord’s anger cannot last for ever, for He delights in kindness, and this truth is affirmed by the soul that has just been the object of it in such a marvellous way. I repeat, in our prophet, the goal has not yet been reached, nor has perfection come, but faith, relying on what God has already accomplished, grasps in advance the full fulfilment of all God’s promises.

And so the Remnant continues: ‘He will have compassion on us once more; he will trample our iniquities underfoot’ (v. 19). Oh, what joy it is for him to speak of God! With what certainty he proclaims what God will do! It will be a complete purification: God, who ‘forgives iniquity’, will not confine Himself to mere forgiveness, but will put it ‘under His feet’, and no longer before His eyes! ‘He will once again have compassion on us’,

for He takes pleasure, not in the judgement of evil—however necessary it may be for His holiness—but in His compassion. And what infinite significance this single phrase, which encompasses the immense work of Redemption, has for hearts turned to God: ‘the compassion of God!’ (Rom. 12:1).

Here the prophet, addressing God Himself, speaks again: ‘And you will cast all their sins into the depths of the sea’ (v. 19). The faithful learn, through the prophetic word, that their sins will never again be an issue, since God Himself will have banished them from His presence and cast them with His own hands into the great abyss. Such will be the nature of the Lord’s new covenant with His people (Heb. 8:10–13).

Finally, the Lord grants the Remnant the joy of having the last word: ‘You will fulfil your faithfulness to Jacob, your kindness to Abraham, which you swore to our fathers from days of old!’ (v. 20). The faithful proclaim that the Lord’s promises are irrevocable. To affirm this, they look back to the unconditional oath that God swore to Abraham and Jacob. The whole history of their accountability as sinners is forever ended. The wilder-

ness and the threatening law of Sinai have come to an end; all that remains for Israel is a God faithful to his promises, a God whose justice is firmly grounded in his grace, a God who justifies the sinner forever whilst condemning sin for all time!

Thus ends this magnificent prophecy. Few prophets highlight more consistently than Micah the grace that rises above judgement and the work of conscience through which the believer is led to enjoy it without reserve. Micah leads us, so to speak, to the threshold of the Gospel and opens the door to it for us.

However, his prophecy is limited to the Remnant of Judah, whom it introduces into the blessings of the new covenant, which they will enjoy as God's people on earth. It leads us step by step to the song of the millennial dawn: 'His goodness endures for ever!' Chapter 2:12 speaks to us of the future gathering of the Remnant. In chapter 4:1–8 we see the Restoration of Jerusalem with the Remnant (v. 7) in its midst. Chapter 5:7–9 shows us the Remnant bearing in the future the very characteristics of their Lord and King: the grace that draws and the strength that prevails. In chapter 7, the Kingdom is established;

the new covenant is sealed, the promises fulfilled; the moral restoration of the Remnant is complete; they can sing the song of deliverance. In all these passages, we are depicted as the flock of the Shepherd of Israel from which the wolves are excluded; a flock led, guarded, fed, sustained and comforted by its glorious Shepherd, and able to say: ‘I shall fear no evil, for you are with me!’