

A Study of the Minor Prophets
The Book Micah – Lesson 3 – Chapter 4

I. Chapter 4: This section of the book focuses on the restoration of Israel and the future exaltation of Jerusalem. The placement of this material in the middle of the book highlights its importance. These prophecies include promises of the return from the Babylonian exile in the near future as well as Israel's final restoration in the last days. This section presents some interpretive challenges. The flow and progression of the argument is difficult to follow because the messages jump back and forth from scenes of defeat and humiliation to images of blessing and salvation. The chronology of the events that the prophet portrays is also difficult to determine because the prophet telescopes near and far events together in some confusing ways. The purpose of prophetic visions was not to give a detailed timeline of the future but rather to reflect patterns of how the Lord would act on behalf of his people in the near future until the time of the eschatological kingdom.

II. The defeat of Assyria and the return from the Babylonian exile are connected to events associated with the first and second comings of Christ because the Lord's actions on Israel's behalf in the near future provide confirmation that he will ultimately fulfill his promises to deliver his people in the distant future. Reading prophecy in the right way means looking for patterns of how God acts in the working out of salvation history rather than trying to determine detailed timelines or discern exact correspondences between biblical prophecies and contemporary events. The promise that the Lord would rule with justice and teach the nations his law in the future kingdom envisions a reversal of the unjust practices of the contemporary rulers of Judah and the corrupt teaching of their greedy prophets.

III. 4:9 In verses 9–10, Daughter Zion is portrayed as a woman in labor, crying out in pain as she is deprived of her king and led away into exile. The image of Zion as a mother in labor is ironic in that many of her residents would be killed or taken away in exile. The prophet's rhetorical, "Is there no king with you?" mocks the people for the misplaced confidence they had put in human kings and military strategies rather than in the Lord.

IV. 4:11 Jerusalem is once again under siege in verse 11, and the prophet appears to telescope events relating to the deliverance of Jerusalem from Assyria in 701 BC and the final deliverance of Israel from all its enemies in the last days. The oracle again quickly changes from judgment to salvation.

V. 5:1 The opening of this oracle reverts back to the theme of judgment, as Daughter Zion is once again under siege by her enemies. The timing of the oracle again blends near and far as the siege of Jerusalem leads into the coming of the promised Messiah.