

THE COMING RULER OF GOD'S KINGDOM: THE MESSIAH, THE LORD JESUS CHRIST MICAH 05:01–15

Introduction

The world today is full of immoral, corrupt leaders. In fact, the world has always been full of wicked and corrupt leaders. A quick study of history reveals this fact. History exposes a long line of unjust, incompetent, greedy, arrogant, abusive and vindictive rulers: kings, princes, czars, presidents, governors, generals...and so on. Almost no generation or century has been spared. Indeed, so many rulers have abused their power, oppressed and exploited their people, that the study of history takes a sharp turn in the 17th and 18th centuries.

From the 17 century on, history is the study of revolution. The people began to revolt. Whole nations and continents were thrown into turmoil and violence as the people began to rise up against their oppressors. Since that time, uprisings and revolutions have occurred in almost every major country and on almost every continent: England, France, Italy, Spain, Russia, China, India and numerous nations in Africa, Asia, South America, Central America and the Middle East. Almost no country or continent has been spared. Revolutions, revolts and social upheavals have occurred almost everywhere.

But one day all this will end. The pattern of corruption and revolution will cease. That is the great hope offered in this passage. Micah prophesied of the coming ruler of God's Kingdom: the Messiah, Jesus Christ. Christ would be the answer to the people's hope, the One to rid the world of corrupt, ungodly leadership. He would execute true justice and righteousness for God's people. He would be the righteous ruler, the One who would reunite and restore the nation of Israel. Not only would He restore the nation, but He would also reconcile the people to God. He would shepherd God's people and bring them peace. He would defeat their enemies. He would cleanse and purify them of all idolatry and evil practices. Last of all, He would execute judgment and righteousness throughout all the earth.

Israel was in desperate need of a righteous ruler, a messiah, a saviour and redeemer. The nation's time of judgment was near, and the people would soon be suffering greatly. Through the prophet Micah, the LORD offered a much-needed hope to His people. The promised Messiah still offers great hope to us today. This is, *The Coming Ruler of God's Kingdom: The Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ*, Micah 5:1-15.

- I. The birth of the coming Messiah (Christ) (vv. 1-2).
 - II. The work of the coming Messiah (vv. 3-15).
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I. Micah 05:01–02 The Birth of the Coming Messiah (Christ)

One of the greatest promises ever made to the human race is given in the prophecy here in Micah, verse two: it is the birth of the Messiah, the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ. Looking back on this prophecy from the time of Jesus' death to this present day, a person can see the incredible number of details so clearly and accurately predicted. Micah first prophesied that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem. But before the coming of the Saviour, the nation of Judah would be conquered. Its capital city, Jerusalem, would be besieged by the Babylonians and all its people exiled.

1. Israel needed a Saviour (v. 1). The people needed someone to deliver and protect them from their enemies. In just a short time, God's judgment would fall upon their nation at the hands of the Babylonians (see Scripture and outlines, Jeremiah 39).
- a. Micah foretold the coming siege of Jerusalem (v. 1a). In his prophetic vision, Micah saw a huge number of Babylonian troops camped around Judah's capital to besiege it. Micah urged the people inside Jerusalem's walls to gather into troops and to defend the city because it was under an attack of the worst kind. In fact, Micah saw so many troops gathered to attack the city that he called Jerusalem the *city of troops* (literally, daughter of troops). The capital was surrounded by a massive army of hostile invaders, conquerors determined to destroy the city. Jerusalem's citizens and rulers — men, women and children, rich and poor, young and old alike — were all in grave danger.

There are two good reasons we can be fairly confident that Micah was prophesying about the Babylonian siege:

- => First, the word *Now* at the beginning of verse one indicates that this was a prophecy regarding the near future. The same word is used in the related prophecy in 4:9-10. In it, Micah named Babylon directly:

Mica 4:9-10 Why do you now cry aloud — have you no king? Has your ruler perished, that pain seizes you like that of a woman in labour? Writhe in agony, Daughter Zion, like a woman in labour, for now you must leave the city to camp in the open field. You will go to Babylon; there you will be rescued. There the LORD will redeem you out of the hand of your enemies.

This prophecy came true when Babylon laid siege to Jerusalem less than one hundred-fifty years from the time of Micah's ministry (see *Timeline of Kings, Prophets & History*; also see *Introduction to Micah*).

- => Second, the Hebrew word for *siege* (masor) in verse one is used in the Old Testament only for Nebuchadnezzar's siege of Jerusalem (see 2 Kng 24:10; 25:2; Jer 52:5; Eze 4:3, 7; 5:2).

Micah's vision was no doubt haunting. A military siege in those days was a horrifying experience — usually lasting months or even years depending on a city's resources and preparation. Citizens of a city under siege were essentially starved into submission.

Cannibalism, even of children, was not uncommon. Therefore, a siege involved a long, drawn-out period of intense and progressive suffering. The *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* describes the word *siege* (masor) in this way:

Applied to military action it means to relentlessly attack an opponent's stronghold. Every effort was made to shut off supplies (especially water, cf 2 Samuel 12:27) from the city and to prevent the people from escaping. The tactics included building a mound to reach the wall and using battering rams and towers to breach it (cf. 2 Samuel 20:15; Ezekiel 26:8f). The inhabitants of a besieged city were threatened by both sword and famine; therefore, some surrendered to the enemy in order to preserve their lives (Jeremiah 21:9). Without great discipline, tension inside the city mounted as prices for anything resembling food soared (2 Kings 6:25). (Laird Harris, Editor. Gleason L. Archer, Jr., Bruce K. Waltke, Associate Editors. *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*).

When Babylon besieged Jerusalem, the people would suffer terribly. Those who did not thirst or starve to death, or die in the slaughter, would be placed in deportation camps and then exiled to Babylon. Israel's leaders would be helpless to stop the carnage.

- b. Israel's ruler was helpless and would be shamed (v. 1b). The ruler mentioned here is not named, but it was likely King Zedekiah of Judah. To be struck on the cheek with a rod was an act of humiliation, and Nebuchadnezzar's treatment of Zedekiah was definitely humiliating. During the people's deportation, Zedekiah was taken captive and made to watch as his sons were brutally killed before his own eyes. Then Zedekiah himself was tortured by having his eyes gouged out (see 2 Kng 25:7; Jer 39:6-7; 52:10-11). Thus, Zedekiah was disgraced before beginning the long, painful march to Babylon) just as Micah prophesied. All of Israel's leaders were helpless to stop God's judgment and the destruction of their city.

Despite the grim prophecy in verse one, all was not lost. Just as Micah did throughout his prophetic book, he offered the people great hope.

- 2. A *Saviour* was coming and would be born in the city of Bethlehem. Israel could have no greater hope than this: the hope of the promised Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ.
 - a. The LORD Himself announced the birth of the Messiah in Bethlehem. Note the sharp contrast between verses one and two, indicated by the word "But." These verses, when read together, essentially say: Jerusalem will be besieged and its king disgraced (v. 1), but a new King is coming, one who will be born in Bethlehem. This is a common pattern in *Micah*: a near or soon-to-happen *crisis* is announced and is then immediately followed by a *promise of deliverance*, one that will occur in the distant future (see for example, 4:11-13).

The ruler referred to is the Messiah, Jesus Christ. Jesus was born in Bethlehem (Mat 2:1). It is worth mentioning that at the time of Jesus' birth, the chief priests and

scribes knew that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem. They quoted this verse in response to Herod who had asked them where the Messiah would be born (Mat 2:3-6).

Bethlehem or the area surrounding it was sometimes referred to as Ephrathah and Ephrath (Gen 35:16-19; 48:7). It was a small, insignificant town about five miles from Jerusalem. Ruth and Naomi went to Bethlehem, and it was there that Ruth married Boaz (Rom 4:11-12). Its only other significance was that King David was born there (1 Sam 16:1, 12-13).

Thought 1. Imagine such a Mighty King, the Saviour of the world, coming from such a small and lowly town! Why would the LORD choose Bethlehem for the birth of His beloved Son when He could have chosen any city, any palace, in all the world? First Corinthians 1:27-29 provides a clue. These verses declare that the LORD uses the weak and lowly things of this world to confound the wise and strong. And in His mercy, the LORD graciously redeems and lifts up the lowly, despised things of this world to bring honour to His Name. Therefore, no one can boast; for it is God who makes the weak strong and the small great. It is God who can make something out of nothing:

1 Cor 1:27-29 But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things — and the things that are not — to nullify the things — that are, so that no one may boast before him.

2 Cor 3:5 Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God.

2 Cor 4:7 But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.

Heb 5:2 He is able to deal gently with those who are ignorant and are going astray, since he himself is subject to weakness.

Thought 2. The choice of Bethlehem for the birth of the Saviour also teaches us an essential lesson about the character and purpose of God. Christ came as a humble servant. He was born into an oppressed, impoverished nation and into a small, insignificant town within that nation. In addition, He was not born into a rich or powerful family but into a working-class family. God Himself — in the form of the Man Jesus Christ — entered the world He created. He did not come clothed as a mighty warrior or king to conquer but came clothed in humility to serve. This is an astonishing fact, and an honest and thinking person will recognize it as such. God, in Christ, came to serve. Think of Christ's humility in condescending to become a man. Think of the humility He displayed in His character and behaviour among the people. Listen to what Scripture says about the humility of Christ:

Mat 8:20 Jesus replied, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head."

Mat 20:28 *“Just as the Son of man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”*

John 12:15 *“Do not be afraid, Daughter Zion; see, your king is coming, seated on a donkey's colt.”*

John 13:5 *After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him.*

2 Cor 8:9 *For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.*

Phil 2:8 *And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death — even death on a cross!*

Isa 53:2-3 *He grew up before him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground. He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain. Like one from whom people hide their faces he was despised, and we held him in low esteem.*

Zec 9:9 *Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion! Shout, Daughter Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and victorious, lowly and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.*

If the God of this universe clothed Himself in humility and descended to us — if He was willing to be despised and rejected by humanity, even dying for us — what should our character be?

- b. Micah predicted not just where Christ would be born but also the great purpose for which He would be sent into the world (v. 2b). God would send Christ to live among people for the great cause of God Himself (“unto me”). That is, Christ would be sent for the glory and praise of God and to do God's will. He would rule God's people and deliver them from all enemies.

As noted previously, the people were in desperate need of a Saviour, a righteous Ruler. Not just one who would deliver them from their enemies, but one who would redeem them from all their sin and unrighteousness. Israel needed a Ruler to guide the people in God's ways, one who could implant in them a new spirit and heart: “But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, says the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people” (Jer 31:33). This is exactly what God has promised to all believers, all those who trust in the Messiah, God's own Son.

- c. Christ's origin was the distant past — eternity, heaven (v. 2c). He came from everlasting (literally in the Hebrew, “*days of immeasurable time*”). This is one of many passages in Scripture that speak of Christ's eternal nature, His existence throughout all eternity. Christ is also described in *Revelation* as having no *beginning*

or *end* (see also John 1:1; Phil 2:6; Col 1:17; Rev 1:8). How could Micah, a mere man, prophesy about the eternal nature of a Messiah yet to come apart from the inspiration of God? He could not!

John 1:1-2 *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning.*

John 8:58 *"I tell you the truth," Jesus answered, "before Abraham was born, I am!"*

Col 1:17 *He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.*

Heb 7:3 *Without father or mother, without genealogy, without beginning of days or end of life, resembling the Son of God, he remains a priest forever.*

1 Pet 2:20 *But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God.*

Rev 1:10-11 *On the Lord's Day I was in the Spirit, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet, which said: "Write on a scroll what you see and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea."*

Rev 1:17 *When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. Then he placed his right hand on me and said: "Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last."*

The prophecy of Christ's birth and coming rule was meant to encourage and give hope to the people of Israel. The people desperately needed hope because their time of judgment was drawing near. However, the people did not fully understand the great promise given them. They failed to grasp the importance of this great hope, to take it to heart and to change their rebellious ways. Instead, they continued in their sin and rebellion. Tragically, Micah's prophecy — the great promise of the coming Messiah — had fallen on deaf ears. Warren Wiersbe writes:

Micah presented an encouraging scenario to the people, but they didn't seem to grasp the significance; for if they had, they would have turned to the LORD in gratitude and repentance. Whenever a prophet foretold the future, it was to awaken the people to their responsibilities in the present. Bible prophecy isn't entertainment for the curious; it's encouragement for the serious. (Wiersbe, Warren: Bible Exposition Commentary).

Thought 1. Wiersbe's words are fitting. Israel's deaf ears should be a warning to us today. We must be careful to heed the message of God's coming judgment. And we must grab hold of the great hope the LORD has given us, the hope of the promised Messiah. God has given the world a Saviour; He has provided for us a Redeemer. Our Saviour and Redeemer is none other than God's own beloved Son, Jesus Christ.

Micah tried to warn the people, but they refused to listen. Still, every believer today has the responsibility to tell the story and to warn all who are lost in a cesspool of sin: judgment is coming. However, there is still time to repent and to turn to the Saviour.

But it will soon be too late. Christ is coming back to earth and no one knows the day or the hour of His return.

Luke 2:11 *Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord.*

John 3:16-17 *"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him."*

John 14:6 *Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."*

Acts 4:12 *Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.*

Acts 5:31 *God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and Saviour that he might give repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel.*

Rom 3:24 *And are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.*

Gal 3:13 *Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree."*

Gal 4:5 *To redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons.*

II. Micah 05:03–15 The Work of the Coming Messiah

Micah continued to describe the distant future, what will happen in the last days. The coming Messiah, Christ Jesus, will accomplish many things on behalf of Israel and its remnant (including all believers). Eight important works of Christ are revealed.

1. First, Christ will end Israel's alienation and separation from God (v. 3) Israel would be abandoned by God during the time of her judgment. The people would not have the benefit of God's protection and fellowship. Yet God would not abandon His people forever. Earlier, Micah had compared Israel's suffering to that of a woman in labour (4:9). Here the prophet declared that Israel's abandonment would *last until she who is in labour has given birth*. "She who is in labour" is Israel. But whose birth is referred to here?
 - a. The birth refers to the Messiah's birth, the birth of Jesus Christ ("she who is in labour bears a son"). Following Christ's birth, of course, were His life, death and resurrection. It would be Christ's sacrificial death that would atone or pay the penalty for Israel's sins. His death would reconcile the people to God. Because of Christ's work on the cross, the people would be *spiritually* restored and reunited to God.

In this sense, the prophecy might also include a reference to all believers (referred to as Christ's brothers). Salvation came through Christ, not only to Israel, but to the whole world (Rom 1:16; 3:29; 10:12). Through Christ's death and atonement,

all those who believe in Him are made God's children through faith (John 1:12). Therefore all believers — both Jew and Gentile — will be restored to the LORD. All believers will be reconciled to God and enjoy His fellowship. And in the last days, once Christ has established His Kingdom on earth, all believers will enjoy the rule and protection of Christ. What a glorious promise!

Israel and the whole human race have been alienated and separated from God since the fall of creation (Gen 1). Though God created us for fellowship with Him, our sin has broken that fellowship. Man's rebellion created the great gulf that exists between the LORD and His creation. Thus it stands to reason that the human race could do nothing to restore this relationship, not on our own. Because it was *our* sin, *our* rebellion, that had broken the relationship, only God could provide the remedy. Only God could restore us. This He accomplished through the glorious work of Christ, His dear Son.

- b. Christ's coming will reunite and restore the nation. A remnant of Israel's people who had been exiled and scattered across the world will at last be gathered by Christ to join their fellow citizens ("his brothers"). Israel's long labour — its judgment and suffering — would end with the birth of a new, reunited nation. All of Israel's exiles (the remnant) will be brought back to the promised land to enjoy the protection of Christ's rule (see Isa 11:10-16; Eze 16:53-63; Hos 3:4-5; Zec 10:9-12). This is the restoration of Israel as a nation.
2. Christ will shepherd His people and give them security (v. 4). The Messiah will "stand and feed" His flock, that is rule and care for God's people. He will nurture and care for them as His very own. The picture here is of Christ the Good Shepherd found in many other passages of Scripture (Mat 2:6; John 10:11; Heb 13:20; 1 Pet 5:4; Isa 40:11; Jer 23:2-6; 31:10; Eze 34:11-16, 23-24, 31; Zec 10:3). Christ will rule over them and provide for their every need, just like a faithful shepherd. Thus, His people will live in complete safety and security. A fuller description of this safety and security is provided in 4:1-5.
 - a. Christ's ministry will be in the strength and majesty of God Himself (v. 4a). Note the importance and implications of these two words, *strength* and *majesty*: Jesus Christ will rule and provide for His people with the very strength of God Himself. And He will rule with the majesty of God's own Holy Name. The *Name of the LORD* represents all of God's power, authority and wisdom — all the perfection of God's character and being. Christ will inherit all of these divine attributes from His Father. He will embody and manifest the very nature of God the Father to His people. He will also rule with the authority of God Himself (Mat 28:18; John 5:27; Eph 1:22; Phil 2:10; 1 Pet 3:22; Rev 11:15).
 - b. Christ's greatness and rule will spread all over the world (v. 4b). During the last days, everyone on earth will *know* Christ and be ruled by Him. His greatness will be known

throughout all creation. His rule will extend from sea to sea and to the uttermost parts of the earth (see 4:1-5; Luke 1:32-33; Psa 2:8-9; 72:8-11; Zec 9:10).

3. Christ will *be* the source of peace (v. 5a). The coming Messiah will bring peace and security to God's people. The peace that Christ brings (*salom*) is far more than the absence of war and aggression. The peace that Christ provides includes absolute security, prosperity and even generosity among the nations. It includes *spiritual* peace within the hearts and souls of God's people as well as peace (reconciliation) between God and man. Christ is the source of many types of peace:

=> Christ's atonement provides peace between God and the human race:

Rom 5:1 *Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.*

Eph 2:14 *For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility.*

Col 1:20 *And through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.*

=> Christ instils peace in the heart, soul and mind of every believer — a peace that *passes all understanding*, a perfect peace that transcends the circumstances and sufferings of this life:

John 14:27 *"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid."*

John 16:33 *"I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."*

Phil 4:7 *And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

=> Christ's Spirit and the new life He imparts establish peace and unity between individuals, between all who truly follow Him and become a part of His church (the assembly of His people):

John 17:22 *"I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one."*

Rom 12:5 *So in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.*

Gal 3:28 *There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.*

Eph 1:10 *To be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfilment — to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ.*

=> Christ's rule will establish peace between all nations:

Psa 46:9 *He makes wars cease to the ends of the earth. He breaks the bow and shatters the spear; he burns the shields with fire.*

Isa 2:4 *He will judge between the nations and will settle disputes for many peoples. They will beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore.*

Zec 9:10 *I will take away the chariots from Ephraim, and the warhorses from Jerusalem, and the battle bow will be broken. He will proclaim peace to the nations. His rule will extend from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth.*

4. Christ will deliver His people from their enemies (vv. 5b-6). First, He will enable them to defeat the Assyrians (vv. 5b-6a). Assyria represents all of Israel's enemies. The "land of Nimrod" is another name for Assyria (see Gen 10:8-9; 1 Chr 1:10). In the last days, many nations will rise up against Israel (4:11-13; Zec 10:10-11; 12:9; 14:1-3; Rev 20:9). But Christ will return and empower Israel to defeat all the nations who are gathered to destroy her (see Rev 20:7-9).

Second, Christ will enable Israel to rule the land of her enemies (v. 6a). *Seven shepherds* and *eight men* simply mean that many leaders, or more than enough, will be raised up to lead Israel against her enemies. The word waste in the phrase, "they shall waste the land of Assyria with the sword" is better translated *shepherd* or *rule* (James Strong. *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*. 7482). These leaders will help Israel defeat her enemies — and also rule (shepherd) the lands of their enemies.

5. Christ will make true believers (the remnant) a blessing to many people (v. 7). God's people will be like fresh morning dew, sharing the *water of life* with all the nations and people of the world (Gen 26:4). Just as rain showers water and nourish the earth — bringing health and life to all living things — so will God's people bring life and health to the world. But also like the rain, which is sent only in God's timing and by His command, so will these things occur only according to the timing of God.
6. Christ will make true believers (the remnant) triumphant over all other people (vv. 8-9). They will be like a lion, dominating all the other nations (animals) of the world. They will be victorious over all their enemies, and destroy them overwhelmingly. This is a striking image. Like a lion dominates its territory and all its enemies, so will Israel dominate its territory and enemies. Like a lion destroys and devours its prey, so will Israel destroy its foes.

What a crushing blow this will be to the proud nations of the earth. In arrogance, many wicked nations have attempted to destroy Israel. And since Christ founded His church, many have sought to destroy it as well. Even today many believers are attacked personally when taking a stand for Christ. But Christ will empower His people — all true believers within Israel and the church — with the strength of a lion. In the last days, evil people and evil nations will attempt to destroy the people of

God; still God's people will not be beaten. Rather, they will be like a lion, the king of the jungle, far stronger than their enemies — undefeatable.

7. Christ will purge and purify His people in the last days (vv. 10-14). Israel has always had enemies from without, that is, other nations who were her enemies. So it will be in the end times. On the other hand, Israel has also had many enemies from within. Generations of Israel's leaders and the vast majority of the people had lived in constant rebellion against God. Micah also prophesied this same rebellion for the last days. However, when Christ returns, He will cleanse and purify His people through one last judgment in order to prepare them for His rule.
- a. Christ will destroy Israel's military power (chariots) and fortress cities (strongholds) before He establishes the Kingdom of God on earth, vv. 10-11. Like all nations on that day, Israel will be placing her trust in her military might and fortified cities. The nation and her leaders will be depending on their own strength and prowess instead of on God. For that reason Christ will allow them to be defeated.

Thought 1. Note that Israel's false confidence will be no different from that of most nations today. Most if not all countries trust in the strength of their economies and armies. And if not in their own economies and military might, they trust in the strength of their allies. Think of the unreliable, unpredictable things that nations put their trust in, such as...

- military strength
- economic strength
- trade alliances
- imperfect and corrupt leaders
- political diplomacy
- science
- technology
- human innovation

...and much more. Wherever people's misplaced trusts lie, most nations live without giving a thought to God. They do not acknowledge their need for the LORD, the need for His guidance, protection and blessing. The great majority of nations believe foolishly that they can meet their own needs, that the human race can solve all its own problems.

However, it is not only nations that fail to trust in God but most individuals as well. Generally, people trust far more in their own strength and abilities and in the strength of their nation or leader than they do in the LORD, the Creator and sustainer of all that is. Equally foolish, they trust in material possessions to bring them happiness and meaning in life. For example, they trust in new houses, cars, clothes, the latest technology, new gadgets and all the latest trends.

All of these are idols. They are the false gods of today. Other people seek fame and notoriety, praise and honour from men, when they should be seeking to please the LORD instead. In short, we can all fall prey to placing trust in man and the things of

man. Our thoughts and desires are too often on worldly things, and our confidence is too often in ourselves. We fail to place our full trust in the Living God — the LORD who made us and all the earth. Listen to what Paul says in Romans:

Rom 1:21-22 *For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools.*

- b. Christ will destroy Israel's idols and false worship practices (vv. 12-14). He will abolish...
- their witchcraft, v. 12
 - their idolatry — the work of their own hands — in which they trusted, v. 13
 - their Asherah poles (groves), v. 14
 - their temples and the cities in which the temples stand, v. 14

This description suggests that Israel will be utterly apostate in the last days before Christ returns. Even the remnant of Israelites who returns to their homeland will be faithless in their devotion to the LORD. They will be turning to false gods, as well as to other nations and allies, for their safety. They will also be influenced by the false religions of neighbouring nations, even turning to magic and sorcery as they had done so often before. However, Christ will destroy all the idols from among them whether they be nations, leaders, military technology, occult practices or actual religious images. Furthermore, He will destroy the cities in which these idols were located. Christ will purge the people of all idolatry and all objects of misplaced trusts. He will rid the land of everything evil and wicked, all that is detestable to God. And mercifully, as we know from other parts of Scripture, He will turn the hearts of the people back to the LORD.

8. Christ will execute judgment on all nations and people who disobey Him and rebel against His rule (v. 15). Note that the vengeance of God (and of Christ in the last days) is not revenge or retaliation as we commonly understand it. Nor is it vindictiveness or punishment that is out of proportion. God's vengeance is an act of judgment for the purpose of righteousness. That is, the purpose of God's vengeance is to bring about repentance, to make all things right. It includes punishment, but it is punishment with a constructive and divine purpose: to turn the hearts of people back to their loving Creator and to bring all things under Christ's rule.

So it will be with the nations who are enemies of God and His people, all those who fail to submit to the will of God and the rule of His Son. Christ will judge and subdue rebel nations. He will execute perfect justice and righteousness. His vengeance, His righteous judgment, will be for the divine purpose of bringing all nations and all people under His rule. All nations will then submit to His reign, and all people will at last obey their true King.

Thought 1. Shamefully, though these prophecies were given more than two thousand years ago, people have failed to listen. Certainly, most Jews have not listened. Nor have the majority of people in any nation listened. The Jews still await a *coming Messiah*, because they have not accepted Jesus of Nazareth. Therefore, they are tragically unprepared for His return.

Sadly, many of us in the church are equally unprepared. Many of us profess Christ as our Saviour but have not committed our lives to Him. Many of us await His second coming — just like the Jews await their Messiah (One who has already come) — but we continue to live in sin and unrighteousness. We do not serve Christ, nor do we love the LORD with all of our heart, soul and mind. God's Holy Word warns us that Christ will return "like a thief in the night." What will He find us doing? It will be too late to prepare when Christ returns. For that reason, we must prepare. NOW! Listen to what God's Holy Word says about Christ's return:

Mat 24:44 *"So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him."*

Mat 25:10 *"But while they were on their way to buy the oil, the bridegroom arrived. The virgins who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet. And the door was shut."*

Mark 13:35 *"Therefore keep watch because you do not know when the owner of the house will come back — whether in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or at dawn."*

Luke 12:35, 36 *"Be dressed ready for service and keep your lamps burning, like servants waiting for their master to return from a wedding banquet, so that when he comes and knocks they can immediately open the door for him."*

1 Th 5:4-10 *But you, brothers and sisters, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief. You are all children of the light and children of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness. So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be awake and sober. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, get drunk at night. But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet. For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him."*

1 Pet 1:13 *Therefore, prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled; set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed."*

1 Pet 4:13 *But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed."*

2 Pet 3:14 *So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him.*

1 John 2:28 *And now, dear children, continue in him, so that when he appears we may be confident and unashamed before him at his coming.*

Rev 3:11 *I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown.*

Rev 16:15 *“Behold, I come like a thief! Blessed is he who stays awake and keeps his clothes with him, so that he may not go naked and be shamefully exposed.” ■*