

When you are reading a book, do you always start at the beginning? Do you always, without fail, read the book without flicking forward a few pages? Do you ever get so excited that you just can't resist having a look at the last page? I have to confess that I often flick ahead and then return to where I'd got to, and I do sometimes find that I just have to look at the last page! I can't resist it! Of course, lots of you are probably far too sensible to do something like that.

When I come to the Bible I don't have to flick forward in the same way, because throughout the Bible there are many references to the end of the story! At times prophecies about the future come thick and fast, and the book of Micah is a good example. Micah is a very short section of the Old Testament. It was written about 700 years before the birth of Jesus, in other words about 2700 years ago; and the name Micah means "Who is like Yahweh". Who is like our God?

Micah was written at a time when people throughout the earth were worshipping a variety of man-made and hand-made gods (Micah 1:7). God was angry that men and women were plotting evil (2:1), angry that men and women were jealous of their neighbours and angry that people were being defrauded of their homes and their inheritances (2:2). Religious leaders and political leaders were not lovers of justice (3:1). Religious and spiritual leaders were open to bribes (3:5); they were quick to prepare to wage war (3:5), and they even thought that what they were doing was done in the name of God (3:11).

To me, that all sounds rather familiar! Micah looked out upon a nation which had lost sight of its mission to be a blessing to the rest of the world. Micah looked out upon a nation which was misusing God's name and declared God's displeasure and God's judgment upon such a situation.

God loves his world, but he will not allow evil to continue forever, and this is where Micah gives us a peep into the future.

Now, this is not some kind of crystal ball gazing. There is not a specific future date to be attached to Micah's words, but they are a glimpse of what life will one day be like when the kingdom of heaven becomes a reality here on earth.

In those future days to come peoples will stream to worship God (4:1). People from many nations will worship the one true God (4:2). They will say of God, "He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths." God will settle the disputes between nations (4:3) which currently rage without an end in sight, and the wonderful future news is that nations which are currently at war will throw away their weapons of war. No longer will nations train for war (4:3). Ordinary men and women will have peace and security: "No-one will make them afraid" (4:4).

God tells Micah about the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians, and he has to tell the people! V10: 'you will go to Babylon' – this happened in 586 BC. He then sees that exiles will return to rebuild the city – this began in 538 BC with Ezra and Nehemiah; 48 years later.

But Micah looks even further into the future and sees that Messiah – the promised Saviour, the Prince of Peace – will come, and in the chapter after today's reading he says that the Messiah will be born in Bethlehem – a tiny insignificant town of a few hundred people, but God chose it to be the birthplace of the person who would save the world. We know that Jesus was born in Bethlehem.

Today we give thanks for and remember men and women who lost their lives in the Great Wars, defending us against invasion, and liberating Europe, but as we do so we do not glorify war in any way.

Seventy-five years ago there were 30 major battles from the Normandy landings to Monte Casino and Kohima in India.

As we give thanks and remember we also look forward to God's future promise of a day when warfare will be a thing of the past (4:3).

Now you may be thinking something along the lines of, “So what? What does the bit of the Bible known as Micah say to us today? Does it apply to how we live and behave right now?” Well, I believe it is very relevant.

Lots of people are concerned, frightened and worried about the state of the world. Where is religious terrorism going to strike next? When will it end? How many more lives will be cut short? The Bible gives us hope! The coming of Jesus into the world gives us very real hope for now, for the future and for eternity!

In the Old Testament the mission of Israel was to be a light to the nations (Isaiah 42:6, 49:6) – that is, they were meant to show what a blessing it was to belong to God. With the coming of Jesus that mission now belongs to Jesus, and he, in turn, sends us out to join in with his mission. Whether we are sitting at a desk tomorrow, or working in a shop, or looking after children, or drinking coffee with a friend, or doing our weekly shopping, or simply going about our daily business, we can each be bearers of hope and light in a hurting world. Pray for the people that you have conversations with. Pray for an opportunity to talk about things that matter, not just what the weather is doing today! Ask them what they did at the weekend. They will probably ask you. What will you say when they do?

Each one of you has got a story to tell, and I can assure you it is a story worth telling! The story of how and why you believe and trust in God is worth telling. Can I challenge you to pray for an opportunity this week? Pray that someone will ask you to explain the reason for the hope that you have (1 Peter 3: 15). Now I know that some of you are thinking, “No way. I can’t do that!” Can I encourage you? Please pray for an opportunity this week.

When someone asks me why I was at church on Sunday, I promise I won’t say, “They pay me to be there.” I promise! I will say, “I was at church because God can be trusted.”

The book of Micah allows us a peep into God’s plans to settle disputes; a future time when many people from many nations will turn to worship the one true God. Let’s live with hope in our hearts, hope in our lives, and hope in the life of this church; hope that will be attractive to people who are searching for meaning, searching for community and searching for acceptance right now.

We all have a part to play in bringing hope – today is not just about the service personnel who have fought and still fight. It is also about us. We are expected to bring hope to the world. We do it by standing for truth; by fighting injustice; by showing Jesus to a needy world. It is seen in the food we give to the foodbank; the way we treat the outsider; and our kindness to a neighbour.