

Hope Comes From Bethlehem

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Micah 5:2-5a

In a minute we are going to read from the book of Micah chapter 5 starting with verse 2

Micah was a contemporary of the prophets Isaiah and Amos. He lived and preached around 750 BC. That is 750 years before Christ. Micah like Isaiah and Amos warned the people of Israel that because of their impenitence they would be destroyed. In the first chapter of Micah, he prophesied that the Assyrians would come and destroy their nation.

However here in Chapter 5 Micah tells the people of Israel that there is still hope. Yes, and more than hope. That hope is to be found in Judah. From Judah there will come one who will once again rule over the full nation of Israel. Although the people of Israel would be scattered and the nation of Israel would never again be, yet God would raise up a shepherd. That Shepherd would gather those who are the children of Abraham by faith. This one would stand and rule over the people of God. He will rule not by strength of arms but through the preaching of the Word.

This is the same hope, yes and more than hope, that we look forward to as well. Although we also are scattered we wait for the shepherd who will stand in the strength of the Lord.

2 “But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times.”

But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah

God gives the exact place and time of Jesus coming. In Daniel he gives the time of his coming. Here in Micah he gives the very village where he will be born. He does this for two reasons. First so that the believers at the time of Jesus would know where to find him. Second so that we would know without a doubt that Jesus is the Christ.

Jesus has two comings. The first is quiet and humble, the second is with a great trumpet and "every eye will see him." The first would have been easy to miss. This is why the exact date and place are given by God, so that those who are waiting and watching will know when and where to find him. The second can't possibly be missed.

When you go geo caching you need the exact coordinates because the box can be easily missed, but if you are looking for the Atlantic Ocean you just go east, and you will find. It is impossible to miss. Jesus first coming was quiet, as we sing in the hymn "**how quietly, how quietly the**

wonderous gift is given." It was necessary for God to give the exact place and time. We don't have need for even a vague time or place for his second coming. It is impossible that anyone should miss it.

Another reason that God gives us the exact place, is so that we might know with certainty that Jesus is the Christ. At the second coming of Jesus faith will not be necessary for everyone will see him. But now faith is necessary, and this is how we can know that Jesus is the Christ. 750 years before he was born Micah names the exact village.

one who will be ruler over Israel

What Micah prophesies here is an absurd impossibility. No person living at the time of Micah would ever have suggested such a thing unless he was mad, or unless the Lord had told him to. Yet despite its absurdity it came to pass, just as the Lord said it would.

For one thing the nation of Israel had rejected the descendants of David as their King and taken Jeroboam instead. Yet here God says that one from Judah, from the city of David and from the line of David would once again rule over Israel.

But even worse yet Micah himself has already prophesied the destruction of Israel. It may be that it has already happened. How can one come out of Bethlehem to rule a people that have been utterly destroyed? the people of Israel were taken into captivity and scattered among the nations.

These things are impossible and yet God brought it to pass in the person of Jesus Christ. He came forth from the town of Bethlehem and he even now rules over the nation of Israel, that is those who are of Israel by faith.

whose origins are from of old, from ancient times.

Once again, we have an impossibility. Micah just said that he will come forth from Bethlehem, but also that his origins are from of old. And yet this impossible thing becomes truth in the incarnation of Jesus Christ who is man and God. From everlasting according to his divine nature and born in Bethlehem according to his human nature.

The gospel of John tells us "**in the beginning was the word.**" Christ told the Pharisees "**Before Abraham was I am.**" Jesus himself says "**I came from the Father and have come into the world**" John 16:28.

Jesus is both he who went forth from before the beginning of the world and also, he who came out of Bethlehem.

Two impossible things that God prophesies through Micah, and yet they come to pass just as he said in the person of Jesus Christ.

3 Therefore Israel will be abandoned until the time when she who is in labor bears a son, and the rest of his brothers return to join the Israelites.

She who is in labor

She who is in labor here is probably not specifically referring to Mary. Although Mary giving birth to Jesus is certainly the ultimate fulfillment of this passage. Rather the passage is speaking of the tribe of Judah as a whole. Israel because of their unbelief was taken captive and scattered, but hope remains through the tribe of Judah. God pictures the nation of Judah as a pregnant woman. She is preserved and not destroyed, not because she deserves this mercy, but for the sake of this child.

It is through Judah that the Messiah would come therefore she is preserved by the Lord until that labor is complete. Of course, Judah was also taken captive, but she was not utterly destroyed and was brought back after 70 years.

Through Judah the child is born, and that child brings back the rest of his brothers.

The Rest of his brothers

The rest of his brothers refers to those who become the children of Abraham through faith.

Israel is the name that God gave Jacob. Jacob had one brother, Esau. Since Israel had only one other brother it is clear that God here speaks about those who are spiritually the brothers of Israel because they are spiritually the children of Abraham

Matthew 3:9 For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones.

Galatians 3:7-8 Therefore know that only those who are of faith are sons of Abraham. 8 And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, saying, "In you all the nations shall be blessed."

Romans 9:7-8 nor are they all children because they are the seed of Abraham; but, "In Isaac your seed shall be called." 8 That is, those who are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God; but the children of the promise are counted as the seed.

Therefore, God's promise here is **not** that at the birth of Christ the physical nation of Israel will be restored, but that in Christ God would gather all those who are the sons of Abraham by faith. The nation of Israel is scattered like wheat seeds on the wind, and Christ harvests from all the nations.

Even as Jesus himself said:

John 10:16 And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock and one shepherd.

We the children of Abraham by faith are still scattered, yet the Christ has come and is gathering us together as the true people of Israel.

Micah 5:4-5 4 And He shall stand and feed His flock In the strength of the LORD, In the majesty of the name of the LORD His God; And they shall abide, For now He shall be great To the ends of the earth; 5 And this One shall be peace.

Jesus will bring together those who are children of Abraham by faith not through the strength of armies but through the preaching of the word. Micah says he will accomplish this not with battles and swords and chariots, but rather he will stand and **FEED** his flock

This is something that even Jesus disciples did not understand until much later.

When the Emmaus disciples were discussing Jesus, they said:

Luke 24:21 **"But we were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel."**

And again, just before his ascension into heaven they asked him:

Acts 1:6 **Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?**

So we see that even the apostles were waiting for Jesus to take up arms and go to war. Yet Micah made it very clear that he would **feed** his flock, not lead them to war.

Micah also says that he would do this **"in the strength of the Lord."** As Paul reminds us **"the gospel is the power/strength of God."**

Isaiah 55:11 **So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; It shall not return to Me void, But it shall accomplish what I please, And it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it.**

This is the strength and power of the Lord, the Word of the Lord. Thus, Jesus compares himself to a farmer casting seed into the ground. He calls himself the bread of life. He fed his flock, when he as our great prophet preached the word of God. He still feeds his flock as he continues to preach his word through his pastors and his word.

Jesus is the ruler who came out of Judah. He was born just as Micah prophesied in the village of Bethlehem. He stands not by the strength of armies but through the preaching of his word. He continues to gather his people, the true Israel, through the preaching of his word. Amen