

Pastor Jeremy M. Thomas
Fredericksburg Bible Church

107 East Austin

Fredericksburg, Texas 78624

830-997-8834 jthomas@fbgbible.org

A1351 – December 22, 2013 – Micah 5:2-6
O Little Town Of Bethlehem

Today we want to take a break from the verse by verse in 2 Corinthians to take a look at the OT book of Micah. Micah is one of the Twelve smaller prophets in the OT and he prophecies of the birthplace of the Messiah. Micah 5:2, “But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, Too little to be among the clans of Judah, From You One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel.” But there is far more to this remarkably specific prophecy than the Messiah’s birthplace in Bethlehem.

To introduce it we want to be reminded of one of the rules for interpreting literature that we will need to employ as we work through the passage. We follow what is referred to as the traditional rules of interpreting literature in contrast to all the new progressive rules for interpreting literature that have been developed recently out of pagan philosophies of language. There are a number of rules involved in interpreting literature that derive from God’s speaking and are therefore part and parcel of human language. Some of those rules are common; the golden rule, if the plain sense makes common sense, seek no other sense; the rule of context, a text taken out of context is not a proof text but a pre-text, etc...But the one rule we want to take a look at that is commonly used in prophecy is called the rule of double reference. This rule states that God often speaks of two events or persons in one passage that are separated by a long gap of time. Yet in the passage they are blended together in one picture and the gap of time is not revealed in the text itself. We see this rule in Micah 5 in that there are two comings of the Messiah predicted and they are separated by a long gap of time and yet here they are blended together and you cannot see the gap of time itself. In fact, if we had been living in Micah’s day we would not be able to see that there was a gap of time, it would simply look like one coming of one Messiah. But in hindsight we now see that there are two comings of one Messiah with a gap of time in between.

That gap of time is between verses 3a and 3b. 3a is the first coming; 3b is the second coming and I just point it out in advance to help you understand the prophecy. Zech. 13:8-9 does the same thing, Isa. 61:1-2 does the same thing. This is a common feature of Bible prophecy to predict two comings of the Messiah blended into one picture.

Now, another introductory note is the fact that in the Hebrew Bible Malachi 5 begins with verse 2 and not with verse 1. Verse 1 in your Bible is actually the last verse of chapter 4. That chapter is prophesying of the near destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians which came in 586BC. Verse 2 begins a new chapter with a different city, the city of Bethlehem. So Jerusalem and Bethlehem are being contrasted. Jerusalem is scheduled for destruction but as for Bethlehem, it is destined to be a city that gives birth to the Messiah. It's a tale of two cities. Jerusalem, as it turns out, was the birthplace of every Davidic King after David but it was not the birthplace of David himself. David could not have been born in Jerusalem because it was a Jebusite city that he conquered later in his military career. So it was not a Jewish city at the time David was born. Where was David born? In **Bethlehem**. Yet every king in David's line after David was born in Jerusalem. And what Micah is predicting is that the next great Davidic King, following the fall of Zedekiah and the city of Jerusalem, would also be born in **Bethlehem**. So you only have two great kings in Israel and both of them were born in the city of Bethlehem. They bookend the Davidic dynasty. David is the first king in the Davidic dynasty, he was born in Bethlehem, all the other lesser kings in Israel were born in Jerusalem, then the last Davidic king will also be born in Bethlehem. So Jerusalem is contrasted with **Bethlehem**. And Micah is looking forward to the last Davidic king but in doing so he stretches back to link the great Davidic King to come, not to the other kings in David's line who were ungodly and born in Jerusalem, but all the way back to David himself who was godly and born in **Bethlehem**.

Now all rabbinic commentators *before* the time of Christ consider this verse to designate the birthplace of the great Davidic King to come. We even know at the time of Christ, that when the wise men from Babylon came to Jerusalem in Matthew 2 searching for the King of the Jews that the scribes and the Pharisees said He was to be born where? "In Bethlehem of Judea; for this is what has been written by the prophet:" and they quote Micah 5:2. So the Jews in the time of Christ held that the great Shepherd would not be

born in the great city of Jerusalem but in the little town of **Bethlehem**. And therein comes your hymn, O Little Town of Bethlehem.

Now this birthplace is named **Bethlehem Ephrathah** and described as **Too little to be among the clans of Judah**. **Ephrathah** is added because there was another town north of Jerusalem named Bethlehem. And to distinguish this Bethlehem from that Bethlehem is added **Ephrathah** which was the name of the town in earlier times. This Bethlehem was only about five miles south of Jerusalem and it was a small town. As the text says, **too little to be among the clans of Judah**, meaning it was not considered as anything significant. A **clan** was a military-political subdivision of the tribe consisting of 1000 men. And Bethlehem was so small it wasn't able to contribute any men to the clan. It was that small and maybe that explains for you why when the census was taken and Joseph and Mary went to Bethlehem to register there was no room for them in the inn. It was a small town and didn't have many accommodations.

But in this little town of Bethlehem Micah says **From you One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel**. This little, small town will be on the map. Like several small towns that have famous people come out of them, so Bethlehem would be. And today Bethlehem is known to virtually every people group on earth as the birthplace of the Messiah. Now the verse indicates that **One will go forth** from this town. And since God cannot be born because He is eternal then the going forth from Bethlehem speaks of his human birth. He will be born in the place called Bethlehem and will be a true human being with a spirit and a body; that is, he will be a human soul or person made in the image of God.

And for what purpose? **To be ruler in Israel**. That is, to be the great Davidic King. All the great rabbis of old consider this function to be carried out by the Messiah. The *Soncino* commentary states, "This prophecy of the Messiah is comparable to the more famous *shoot out of the stock of Jesse* prophecy in Isa. xi... Micah foretells the coming of one from Bethlehem (i.e. of the house of David) who, in the strength of the Lord, will restore Israel to their land and rule with them in God's name and abiding peace."

Now this one who came forth from this small town and would rule, Isaiah says, had no stately form or majesty; that is, he did not look like kingly

material. And yet did David look like kingly material? When Samuel came to Jesse's house and Jesse brought out his sons he looked at the oldest Eliab who appeared kingly and thought, "Surely this is the Lord's anointed." But the Lord said to Samuel, "Do not look at his appearance, at the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart." At last little David was brought in and he did not look like a king but "the Lord said, "arise, anoint him; for this is he." In the same way Jesus did not look like kingly material but God chose him to be the King of Israel. This great King was destined to receive the three fold promise of an eternal dynasty, an eternal throne and an eternal kingdom in the land of Israel. And so David's house was chosen to be the house that would give rise to the King of Kings. It is only fitting then that the King of Kings, King David and the city of Bethlehem have so many historical connections.

I've identified four connections between this town, King David and King of Kings. One is that King David was born in Bethlehem and the King of Kings to come was also to be born in Bethlehem. Two is that King David started off as a shepherd boy who tended his father's sheep and also the King of Kings to come was destined to be a great Shepherd who would tend His Father's sheep. Three is that the name Bethlehem is from a compound word, *bayit-lechem* meaning "house of bread." King David provided the bread of life for his kingdom; the King of Kings to come would actually be the bread of life Himself. Four is that King David did not appear to be kingly material and so also the King of Kings did not appear with any stately form or majesty, yet both of these were chosen by God to be the king. So there are a number of strong connections between Bethlehem, King David and the King of Kings to come.

There was a strong disconnect that is noted at the end of verse 2. The One who would go forth from Bethlehem to be ruler in Israel, **His goings forth are from long ago, From the days of eternity.** David was born in Bethlehem but David's goings forth are not from long ago and certainly not from eternity. These are statements of deity and David was not deity. David was mere humanity, but the King of Kings will be both humanity and deity. His humanity will go forth from Bethlehem but His deity is from all eternity. Two things are actually being taught with these last two expressions. The first expression, **His goings forth are from long ago** refers to His

preexistence. Literally translated it says “His visitations are from ancient times.” It means that in earlier times in history He was visiting the world, making appearances as the pre-incarnate Christ. For example, it would refer to His work at creation as the word of God, it would refer to His appearances to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, it would refer to His appearances to Abraham and Isaac, to His wrestling with Jacob, to His appearance to Moses in the burning bush, to His appearance in the fire by night and the cloud by day as He led Israel through the wilderness, to His appearance to Joshua as commander-in-chief of the Lord's armies near Jericho. These are all his visitations from ancient times as the pre-incarnate King of Kings. The second expression goes beyond this, **His goings forth are...from the days of eternity.** This does refer to His eternality. That is, before time He is there. He is the eternal son of God. Charles Feinberg, the Orthodox Jew who was converted to Christianity in 1930 and went on to study at Dallas Theological Seminary and became professor of Semitic languages and Old Testament said, “The phrases of this text are the strongest possible statement of infinite duration in the Hebrew language (Ps 90:2; Pr 8:22-23).” The King of Kings is the eternal God come forth out of Bethlehem clothed in true humanity.

Before we leave verse 2 we want to make one more observation about this great Shepherd King who would arise from Bethlehem to rule in Israel. And that is, the identity of the one He would go forth to rule for. **From you One will go forth for Me.** Who's **Me**? The Father. **Who is the one who will go forth?** The Son. So we have the Son going forth on behalf of the Father to fulfill the Father's purpose, an intratrinitarian purpose, that the Son not the Father, **be ruler in Israel.**

Verse 3, **Therefore,** conclusion, **He will give them up until the time When she who is in labor has borne a child.** In other words, remember verse 1 which really connects with chapter 4, discussed the southern kingdom's exile to Babylon. To be given up was to be given into Exile to pagan kingdoms. The northern kingdom had already gone into Exile to Assyria in 721 BC. The southern kingdom would go into exile to Babylon. It occurred in 586BC. So both kingdoms would be given up into Exile until a certain time. Notice the **until.** That's a timing word. Until what? **until she who is in labor has borne a child.** Who is this a prophecy of? This is a prophecy of the virgin Mary **in labor** giving birth to **a child.** They already knew from Isaiah 7:14 that a virgin would be with child and would bear a son

and he would be called Immanuel, which means “God with us.” So they already knew of the virgin birth and if they connected this prophecy with the virgin birth prophecy then they understood that the two Jewish kingdoms would be given into Exile until this virgin gave birth to this child.

Now the time period of exile actually was four pagan Gentile kingdoms because the child was born during the Roman Empire. The reason for this is that Daniel prophesied four successive Gentile kingdoms before the kingdom of God came upon the earth. The prophecy comes by way of a recurring dream by King Nebuchadnezzar wherein he saw a statue and the statue would gradually appear and first he would see a golden head appear and then a silver breast and arms, then a bronze waist and thighs, then iron legs and feet of iron partly mixed with clay would appear and finally a stone, cut out without hands would strike the statue at the base and destroy the entire statue simultaneously and the stone would grow very large. To Daniel the interpretation of the dream was revealed that this was a basic sketch of four successive Gentile kingdoms followed by Christ’s kingdom and the restoration of the Jews; first Babylon, second Medo-Persia, third Greece, fourth Rome, finally Christ’s kingdom. God, in Micah, is saying I’m going to give the Jews into Exile to these four kingdoms until a woman who is in labor gives birth to a child. Then Christ’s kingdom will come.

Now the woman with child gave birth to the child during the fourth kingdom of Rome just as the Bible prophecies. But Christ’s kingdom did not come. The king came and in that sense the kingdom drew near but the kingdom did not come. Why did the kingdom not come? Is it as though the word of God failed? May it never be! Other OT prophecies require that the nation Israel receive their king. If the Jews had received their king Christ’s kingdom would have come. But they did not and so the final kingdom of Rome is broken into two phases, the historic phase is past, the future phase is still to come and when it comes Israel will receive her king and Christ’s kingdom will come and the whole world will sing the famous hymn of Isaac Watts, *Joy to the World*, for the Lord will have come in His kingdom in the earth and destroyed all evil empires and establish perfect righteousness and peace. Israel will be a re-united kingdom and no longer two divided kingdoms but one united kingdom with Christ ruling as king. That's what the end of verse 3 is talking about.

Then the remainder of His brethren Will return to the sons of Israel.

If that doesn’t affect your foreign policy, I don’t know what will; it affected

Great Britain's foreign policy for two centuries and its affected ours for over a century. Harry Truman even saw himself as Cyrus who would restore the Jews to their land. But at this future time all 12 tribes will be reunited in the land as one Jewish kingdom in peace, with no surrounding enemies, and Christ will sit on David's throne and rule with power and great glory!

However, we said that didn't happen in the 1st century when the Christ came the first time because they did not welcome Him. And that's why in the middle of verse 3 we see the illustration of double reference. Verses 2-3a refer to the first coming of the Christ; verses 3b-6 refer to the second coming of the Christ. In between those two comings is a long gap of time. We only know about that long gap of time because we live in hindsight, we actually live in the long gap of time between the first and second comings of Christ, a period known as the Church. But if we were living in Micah's day we would only see one coming, a blending of the two comings into one. But now we see there are two comings.

So verse 4 is that future time of the second coming when He comes to do what any good boy out of Bethlehem would do; **And He will arise and shepherd His flock**, this is in the kingdom to come and His flock is Israel and the NT in John 10 indicates others who receive Him will come into His flock and He will shepherd them too. And when He does He will do so **In the strength of YHWH, in the Majesty of the name of YHWH His God**. That's an interesting look at the fact that although Jesus is God in His humanity He will rule in dependence upon the Father, the one He calls, **His God**, both during His first and second advents. That is, in the kingdom the Messiah is going to function in the same way He functioned at His first coming, namely He's going to give up the independent use of His divine attributes and operate **in the strength of Yahweh, and the Majesty of the name of Yahweh His God**. He is not going to operate independently of His Father in the kingdom. He is going to operate in his resurrected humanity in dependence upon the Father such that He can reign as a true human being and fulfill the dominion mandate originally given to Adam.

And they [Israel] will remain, Because at that time He will be great To the ends of the earth. Twice Israel has been uprooted from her land, once in 586BC and second in AD70. Twice she has returned; once in 539BC and second in 1948. There is one final uprooting to come but then a final return

will occur and they will never be uprooted again. Why? Because when the Christ returns He will be great and He will never allow Israel to be destroyed. His kingdom is the fifth kingdom prophesied by Daniel by a stone cut out without hands that smashes the all Gentile kingdoms. The stone then grows into a global kingdom that will never be destroyed. The Davidic promises will be fulfilled by Christ the King who will sit on the eternal throne of David and rule an eternal kingdom and put all His enemies under His feet. This one - who went forth from little Bethlehem -will rule the whole world.

This one, Micah says in verse 5, **will be our peace**. He will bring peace to the world. The world wants peace and the world is headed for peace but it comes after the worst period of human history, the great tribulation. Someone is going to invade the land in the last days. He is, in verse 5, titled **the Assyrian. When the Assyrian invades our land, When he tramples on our citadels**. There is one titled the Assyrian who will invade Israel in the last days. We know this one as the anti-Christ. Commentators argue whether **the Assyrian** refers to his descent or whether it's a title characterizing his invasion as like the tyrant Assyrian kings. It's possible that it's both because the ancient region of Assyria was encompassed by the full extent of the Roman Empire and the anti-Christ must come from Rome and be a tyrant. The Antichrist has many titles. He is called the little horn, the Prince that shall come, the willful King, the man of sin, the beast, the son of perdition, etc... And it is possible that since Micah and Isaiah both wrote in the times when Assyria was the dominant world power, led by tyrant, despotic rulers, that the Antichrist is merely being depicted under the metaphor of the Assyrian. When he comes he will be like the Assyrian rulers of the eighth century BC. He will be a tyrant, he will be a despot, he will oppress and persecute the Jewish people. But when he invades the land of Israel **Then we [Israel], will raise against him [anti-Christ] Seven shepherds and eight leaders of men.** **They will shepherd the land of Assyria with the sword, The land of Nimrod at its entrances; And He [Christ] will deliver us from the Assyrian When he attacks our land And when he tramples our territory.** It's evident that the Jews will fight against the anti-Christ, not only from this passage but from others. But as far as I know this prophecy of **seven shepherds and eight leaders of men** is not repeated anywhere else in the Scriptures. But what it means is that when the Messiah returns to rescue Israel and bring peace on the earth, He will appoint **seven Jewish shepherds and eight Jewish leaders** to do the

work of verse 6 in the kingdom. **They will shepherd the land of Assyria with the sword, the land of Nimrod at its entrances;** so that would mean that Jews will rule over these nations during the millennium. Those nations, interestingly, are Iraq and Iran, Shiite and Sunni Muslim nations. And this all occurs **When he** [the anti-Christ] **attacks our land And when he tramples our territory.** That is, when he attacks the land of Israel and tries to annihilate them then the time will come that the nation Israel will receive Christ as their king and He will return and destroy the anti-Christ and those nations who fight with him, then He will regather the nation Israel from the four points of the compass, and at last reign on David's throne and establish His kingdom in all the earth. Micah takes us all the way from the first coming of the one who would be born in Bethlehem to His second coming when He will arise and shepherd His flock in the strength of the LORD from Jerusalem, in the majesty of the name of the LORD His God, and at that time Israel will remain forever. Because at that time the Messiah will be great to the ends of the earth and there will be world peace. Until that time we celebrate Christmas, the birth of the King, the one that Israel did not receive and because they did not receive Him the floodgates of salvation have been opened to us Gentiles. We live in the long gap of time between His two comings, but that gap of time seems very short now. Israel is already back in the land in preparation for her coming King. So believe on the Lord Jesus Christ today and you shall be saved. And until the King comes we will celebrate Christmas in remembrance of God's gift to us, the free gift of salvation in Christ the King. But when He comes we will no longer celebrate Christmas by remembering the birth of the King; rather we will celebrate the Marriage Supper of the Lamb as we personally observe His reign over all the earth!

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