

Little Made Great Micah 5:2-5a

Introduction

Three years ago we surveyed the Minor Prophets. The theme of the series was *Relentless Love*—that of God pursuing His wayward people. Among those prophets was Micah.

Micah—“Who is like Yahweh?”

Micah 7:18

Who is a God like You?

The answer: *No one else is like the Lord. Only He can deal with the brokenness of the human condition. Only He can restore us to the peaceful joy of worship as those who are right with God.*

One passage in Micah has become known round the world to this day because of its connection to the birth of Christ. Every Christmas season believers and unbelievers alike reference words from our text for this morning, Micah 5:2-5a.

Micah served the Lord the 8th century B.C during the reigns of the Judean kings Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah. Jotham was a righteous king; Ahaz was wicked and weak; and Hezekiah was among the most godly kings Judah ever had. During these years the

Assyrians took northern tribes of Israel captive and threatened the southern kingdom of Judah as well. You remember God's intervention during the days of King Hezekiah, when the angel of the Lord destroyed 185,000 Assyrian troops in one night, ending their siege of Jerusalem. Micah was contemporary of the prophet Isaiah and was well acquainted with Isaiah's prophecies, even quoting directly from Isaiah.

Micah's prophecy develops four major themes:

1. The Lord's Indictment: God sees what's really going on.
2. The Lord's Justice: God will set all things right (judges those who practice sin).
3. The Lord's Rescue: God will bring peace.
4. The Lord's Messenger: God reveals His heart.

Our text is part of the third theme:
The Lord's Rescue: God will bring peace.

This rescue and consequent peace come through a Person long promised by God through the prophets, known as the Messiah, the Anointed One—the Savior-King, fulfilled in the Person of Jesus.

² But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is

to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days. ³ Therefore he shall give them up until the time when she who is in labor has given birth; then the rest of his brothers shall return to the people of Israel. ⁴ And he shall stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God. And they shall dwell secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth. ⁵ And he shall be their peace.

1. Desperate Need for Rescue (1, 3)
2. Humble Birth of the Promised Ruler (2)
3. Divine Character of His Universal Reign (4-5a)

1. Desperate Need for Rescue (1, 3)

The historical context is one of *impending judgment and besieging armies*. Judah has taken up the idolatry and abuse that characterized the Canaanite nations God drove out of the land before them.

People would lie in bed scheming how they could take advantage of others in order to get more money, things, and property. *Greed drives a person to do all kinds of wicked things toward other people. (You can't serve God and money.)*

In ancient Israel land was allotted by family inheritance. It could be temporarily sold to

pay off debts, but it was never to become the permanent possession of anyone outside the family line. Powerful people in both Israel and Judah found a way never to give it back. They ignored the sabbatical years when debts were to be forgiven and fields were to lie dormant for use by the poor.

They did not celebrate the year of jubilee (50th year after seven sevens of years) when all property was to revert to the family that rightfully owned it by inheritance, and all who had had to sell themselves as slaves to satisfy debts were to be set free.

Those in authority used their power to line their own pockets by taking advantage of those unable to defend themselves and catering to those who could pay them off. Criminals and lawmakers were one in the same. Instead of feeding people, they were feeding on people like cannibals. Businessmen and merchants cheated people in the marketplace in order to fill up their treasures. Greed was driving everything. Even priests and prophets taught and prophesied for hire.

God would see to it that all the wealth they cheated to acquire would become the wealth of oppressing nations. Assyria and Babylon would be a rod in His hand to bring retribution. The idols they love and the wages they coveted would be destroyed and stolen.

They gave their wealth to idols, so idolatrous conquerors would take their country from them along with everything they possess. God's judgment would be inescapable, unstoppable, and overwhelming.

This desperate state of affairs is why Micah 5 starts out as it does.

Micah 5:1

Now muster your troops, O daughter of troops; siege is laid against us; with a rod they strike the judge of Israel on the cheek.

The judge of Israel refers to the king in Jerusalem who was to exercise justice. The rod of foreign nations will attack and humiliate him, no matter how hard his troops try to defend their homeland. Judah's kings too proud to bow the knee to the Lord will one day grovel before the king of Babylon and suffer terrible atrocities.

Micah 5:3

Therefore he shall give them up until the time when she who is in labor has given birth; then the rest of his brothers shall return to the people of Israel.

For their sins the Jews would suffer captivity and dispersion among the nations. Already during the days of Rehoboam they had been

divided because of the judgment of God on their idolatry practiced even by Solomon. But God would not give them up forever: "until the time when she who is in labor has given birth."

Who is "she"?

Remember that Micah knows Isaiah and his prophecies. The "she" is the mother of the promised Messiah.

Isaiah 7:14

Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.

Micah 5:3b

Then the rest of his brothers shall return to the people of Israel.

As part of God's restoration of His people, the Messiah will reunite the tribes of Israel, separated from one another for centuries because of God's judgment on them. They are his brothers.

The world is still a dark and desperate place. Our sins make us ripe for judgment. Greed and abuse of power are commonplace. Threats abound. The enemy is at the gate. And there is still just one Person who can fix it all. We are undone until the Offspring of the woman crushes the evil and rescues us from

the calamities our sins bring. His name is Jesus.

2. Humble Birth of the Promised Ruler (2)

But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days.

Bethlehem—house of bread
Ephrathah—fruitful field

Too little to be among the clans of Judah

The book of Numbers records that the tribes of Israel were divided into groups of a thousand families, with a leader appointed for each clan. Bethlehem was little enough that there were not even a thousand families there. Joshua 15 does not even mention it among the cities allotted to Judah.

From you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel

Bethlehem's significance was not its size, but its connection to the Messiah and his ancestry.

Where Jacob's wife Rachel died in childbirth. Call her son Ben-oni—son of my sorrow; Jacob changed the boy's name to Benjamin—son of my right hand.

Where Ruth gleaned in the fields of Boaz, the kinsman redeemer. He married Ruth. To them was born Obed, the father of Jesse, the father of David. From David would spring the Redeemer from sin and death—who would become our Kinsman by becoming a human being Himself, and as such, pay the ransom for our sin in His own lifeblood.

Where David was born.
The king after God's own heart, whose throne was to be everlasting in the person of his messianic descendant.

Through Micah, God turns our attention away from Jerusalem's impending doom and the dark desperation of its current state to His covenant promises to king David anointed as a shepherd boy in Bethlehem.

What is small and insignificant to man becomes of vast importance when God uses it in his plan. He chooses the weak in this world to shame the strong (1 Corinthians 1). The Messiah would be a shoot from the stump of Jesse. It looked as if the line of David was finished—chopped down.

"Come forth for me"—this ruler would be better than David. He would perfectly display God's heart and perfectly fulfill God's will.

Whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days

From of old—used elsewhere to refer to the time of the patriarchs Abraham and Jacob (Micah 7:20), the events of the Exodus (Ps. 74:2,12; 77:11, Isa. 51:9), the conquest of Canaan (Ps. 44:1), or the days of David (Neh. 12:46), and even eternity when used of God (Dt. 33:27, Ps. 55:19, Hab. 1:12).

From ancient days—Micah 7:14 of the era of conquest and settlement of Canaan; Amos 9:11 of David's kingdom; Isaiah 63:9, 11 of the Exodus; Proverbs 8:22, 28 of eternity before the creation of the world.

All this points to this coming ruler's historical existence and activity before his birth, stretching even into eternity before the creation of the world. In the garden of Eden God predicted the offspring of the woman would crush the serpent's head, and the prophets continued to talk of him for centuries before his coming.

The good news of the gospel comes through what seems small and insignificant to the world. It offers grace to those who know what sinners they are. It gives power to those who know they are weak. It is prized by the humble and needy and despised by the proud and self-sufficient. Bethlehem is little, but the

eternal Savior-King who will rule the universe was born there.

3. Divine Character of His Universal Reign (4-5a)

⁴ And he shall stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God. And they shall dwell secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth. ⁵ And he shall be their peace.

Compassionate Care

Shepherd his flock—rulers in Israel are often referred to as shepherds, but too often they abused the flock instead of caring for it. But the Messiah will shepherd the flock of God with the heart of God for His people like what Psalm 23 describes. They will lack for nothing. They need fear nothing. They can expect everything good from Him.

Isaiah 40:10-11

¹⁰ Behold, the Lord GOD comes with might, and his arm rules for him; behold, his reward is with him, and his recompense before him.

¹¹ He will tend his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms; he will carry them in his bosom, and gently lead those that are with young.

Micah 4:6-7

6 In that day, declares the LORD, I will assemble the lame and gather those who have been driven away and those whom I have afflicted; **7** and the lame I will make the remnant, and those who were cast off, a strong nation; and the LORD will reign over them in Mount Zion from this time forth and forevermore.

Jesus calls Himself the Good Shepherd. He lays down His life for His sheep. No one can take them out of His hand. He knows them by name and they know His voice. Hebrews calls Him the Great Shepherd. Peter calls Him the Chief Shepherd. But perhaps the best of all is from David: "The LORD is my shepherd."

Majestic Strength

The Messiah displays the strength of Yahweh in His sovereign care. No enemy foreign or domestic can threaten His sheep.

His royal splendor is that of the very character of Yahweh His God. His words will come from Him; His works will come from Him (John 5). He and His Father are one. He is anointed with the Spirit of God and gives the Spirit without measure to those trusting in Him.

Peaceful Security

And they shall dwell secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth. ⁵ And he shall be their peace.

The angel Gabriel uses words from this prophecy when he tells Mary she is to be the mother of the Messiah:

Luke 1:32-33

³² He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, ³³ and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.

All will be well. No threats to alarm because His greatness will extend to the ends of the earth. Isaiah prophesied that the nations would trust in Him. The hallmark of the Messiah is that His kingdom would extend beyond the borders of Israel to all the earth. Every language and nation and tribe will serve Him. His gospel will go to all ethnicities, for as God promised to Abraham, "In your offspring all the families of the earth will be blessed."

No wonder Isaiah calls this child to be born the Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6).

Micah 4:1-5 describes what it will be like quoting the words God sent through Isaiah in Isaiah 2:2-4:

Yahweh will bring justice and equity not just to Israel and Judah, but to all nations, the

entire world. So much so that nations won't need weapons or even military training for protection. This peace will extend to every neighborhood. Every person will be able to enjoy his own property with no fear of being robbed or attacked.

Find the safety your heart longs for in Him.

He is Savior.

Find your life purpose in gladly obeying Him.

He is King.

Find in Him your greatest object of love and your chief reason for joy. He is Lord and God.

Conclusion

When the wise men from the east asked Herod where the king of the Jews was to be born, the chief priests and scribes quickly answered by quoting from this passage in Micah—in Bethlehem of Judea. Bethlehem was only six miles from Jerusalem. These powerful religious leaders knew Scripture verses but had no interest in finding Him who is the promised Hero the Scriptures portray. Bethlehem was too little to be important to them.

In contrast, when the angels had announced Christ's birth to the shepherds, they rushed to see the newborn baby. Gentiles from Persia saw His star in the east, they traveled a thousand miles to worship Him. King Herod was troubled by the announcement,

pretended he wanted to worship him, but tried instead to have Him killed by murdering all the children under 2 years of age in Bethlehem.

These leaders were too big in their own sight to do anything but trample on a place so small and insignificant as Bethlehem. Nor did they care about the child born to save and to rule—except as He disrupted their own power and pride.

They failed to understand that Little Made Great is God's gospel way.

*Once upon a bed of straw
Slept the Sovereign Son of God
Lord of the universe
Breathing the dust of earth*

*Once upon a splintered cross
Jesus died to rescue us
All of our shame and sin
Nailed to the tree with Him*

*Once upon a brilliant day
Christ the Conqueror was raised
Heaven and nature sing
"Praise to the King of kings!"*

*Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, our Messiah
Name above every name, Gloria in the highest*

Sovereign Grace, "Once Upon" from the album
Heaven Has Come

Micah's very name asks "Who is like Yahweh?" No one. He alone takes what is small and despised and makes it great. What a Savior!

1. Desperate Need for Rescue (1, 3)
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Discussion Questions

1. Why is it important to us that Micah's prophecy of the coming Savior-King was given during a time of spiritual crisis for Judah?
2. The sins of Judah had much to do with greed, abuse, and idolatry. What parallels do you see with our own culture?
3. With the desperation of the times, why would the birth of a child give anyone any hope?
4. What insights does God's choosing the little town of Bethlehem as the birthplace of the Messiah give us about how God works?
5. The reign of the Messiah is in keeping with the heart of God toward His people, offering compassionate care, majestic strength, and peaceful security. What thoughts and feelings toward Jesus does that stir in your own heart?

6. What are some ways you have experienced the shepherding care of God in your life?
7. Why do you think there was such a difference in response to Christ's birth with Herod, the chief priests and scribes versus the shepherds and the wise men?