

**Micah 5:2-5a But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, from you, will go out the one who will be the ruler for me in Israel. His goings forth are from the beginning, from the days of eternity. <sup>3</sup>Therefore the LORD will give them up, until the time when the woman who is in labor bears a child. Then the remaining survivors from his brothers will return to the people of Israel. <sup>4</sup>He will stand and shepherd with the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God. They will dwell securely, for at that time he will be great to the ends of the earth. <sup>5</sup>This one will be their peace.**

When I was pastor in Wisconsin, I had a member named Micah. His parents obviously named him after the prophet who was inspired to write the words of this text. One day he was in a serious accident. He ended up breaking his neck. Thankfully, he wasn't paralyzed. His surgery was a success, but he had to wear a halo wherever he went to keep his neck stable.

He was in a Catholic-run hospital in Green Bay. One of their chaplains came to check in on him. They would usually ask if the patient had a church-home and if they'd like their pastor contacted. The funny thing was that the chaplain didn't know how to pronounce his name. Meecah? He's an Old Testament prophet! He foretold the location of Jesus' birth! How can't you know?

I don't expect that the average person on the streets would know anything about him, which is a shame. His words have brought comfort and confidence to believers ever since he first wrote them roughly 700 years before the birth of our Savior. So as we study this text, we'll ask some Christmas Questions. Who will the Savior be and what will the Savior do?

Micah writes, **"But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, from you, will go out the one who will be the ruler for me in Israel."** Ephrathah is an older name for Bethlehem. Perhaps this was mentioned to differentiate it from the other Bethlehem that was in the northern part of the country. That city is not far from Nazareth.

Besides being divided up into the twelve tribes of Israel, the people were further divided up into clans. That word literally means 1,000 because they would consist of roughly that many people. Micah is saying that Bethlehem is so small and insignificant that it's population isn't near 1,000. It's only claim to fame—and it was a big one—was that it was the hometown of Israel's greatest king, King David.

So it was very fitting that Jesus would be born in that same town. God had promised to David that one of his descendants would rule on his throne forever. We heard God make that promise in the sermon text on Thanksgiving. Isaiah foretold this about Jesus: **"He will rule on David's throne and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness from now on, into eternity. The zeal of the LORD of Armies will accomplish this."**

Another reason why it was fitting that Jesus would be born there is specifically because it was so small and otherwise unimportant. No one in Bethlehem could ever claim that they helped make Jesus who he is. He had no benefit from being born in a barn there with an animal's foot trough as his first bed. It showed how Jesus came here to humble himself so that he could live with us and for us and ultimately die for us.

If you read through this whole book, there is a repeating pattern. In order God addresses the people, their leaders, and the nation itself. He warns them of his coming judgment, but then he also reminds them of his faithful promises. That shows that God is always consistent. He is always serious about the threats he makes in his law and he will follow through on them. But he was not about to let his people's sin cause his plan of salvation to crash and burn. His promises will be fulfilled.

Part of that warning of God's judgment is in this text, **"<sup>3</sup>Therefore the LORD will give them up, until the time when the woman who is in labor bears a child."** That happened. In 586 B.C. David's line came to an end when the Babylonians invaded and deported the people. From that point onward, the Promised Land would be ruled by other nations. After the Babylonians came the Persians, then the Greeks, and finally the Romans. Just like Bethlehem couldn't take any credit for making Jesus who he is, neither could Israel as a nation. This was all God's doing.

Micah promised that this child who would be born would be **"the ruler for me in Israel."** If this was just a promise of another human king, that wouldn't be particularly comforting. Even the very best rulers are still sinners, which means that they are going to make some bad decisions from time to time. Their rule is always going to be limited because no one lives forever.

Micah shows that this ruler would be different, **"His goings forth are from the beginning, from the days of eternity."** So while Jesus was going to be born in Bethlehem, he didn't come into existence on that first

Christmas Day. He is true God which means that he has always existed. The only difference is that now he has taken on a true human nature which he still has today.

Jesus didn't first become active in this world on Christmas Day either. He took part in the creation of the world with God the Father and God the Holy Spirit. He is the angel of the LORD who appeared at various times throughout Old Testament history. He is the one who spoke to Moses in the burning bush. He showed his presence with them in a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire at night all the way from Egypt to the Promised Land.

Micah also says, "**Then the remaining survivors from his brothers will return to the people of Israel.**" Did you catch that? He calls us his brothers! He doesn't call us sinners, even though that's what we are. He doesn't call us slaves. He calls us family! The writer to the Hebrews said, "**For he who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified all have one Father. For that reason, he is not ashamed to call them brothers.**"

Jesus needed to be both things. He needed to be true God and a true human being in one person so that he could be our perfect Savior. Because he is a true human being he could be subject to God's Law in the exact same way that we are. Because he is a true human being he could die on the cross, allowing God's holy anger to come down on him and not on us.

But he also needed to be true God so that he could obey his own Law perfectly in our place. Because we inherited sin from our parents, we lose before we even get a chance to start. Not Jesus. Because he is true God, his death on the cross would be sufficient to pay for the sins of the whole world. So seven centuries in advance Micah told God's people that God would send them the perfect Savior that we all need.

Today we're asking some Christmas Questions. We've seen who will the Savior be. Now we will ask what will the Savior do?

God inspired Micah to use a picture of Jesus that was also used by people like King David and the Prophet Isaiah. Jesus even used it for himself in his ministry. It is the picture of him as our Good Shepherd. We have a painting of that by the main doors to our school. "**He will stand and shepherd with the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God.**"

God had intended that the Old Testament prophets, priests, and kings would shepherd his people faithfully. All too often they failed miserably. God said through the Prophet Ezekiel, "**Woe to you, shepherds of Israel, who have been shepherding for themselves. Aren't shepherds supposed to shepherd for the benefit of the sheep?**" They weren't leading the people, they were using them to their own advantage.

Jesus would not be like that. Micah says, "**He will stand and shepherd.**" That doesn't mean that he would never sit. It's more like when we talk about someone taking their stand. He is wielding his almighty power for our benefit. So many times this life seems to be out of control. For us, it is, but not for him. Not only does he have the power to deal with anything that might come up, he already knows how every moment of every day is going to play out.

That's why Micah can also write, "**They will dwell securely.**" Security was a major theme of the last election, whether is border security, political security, or cybersecurity. People feel this desperate need to be safe. No earthly government can guarantee that. The only way that could happen is if you were locked up in a room all by yourself. Then you would be perfectly safe, but you would lose all your freedom.

Jesus doesn't have that problem because he shepherds us "**with the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God.**" The police can't be everywhere at once. Jesus can and he is. Governments often have to react to a natural disaster or some other kind of attack. Jesus knows that they are going to happen already. Obviously courts can't set us free from sin. Jesus took care of that on the cross.

Now, that doesn't mean that everything will always go perfectly for us for the rest of our lives. God knows when it is best to allow some problems to come into our lives. We're still secure because he is using that for our good. Maybe he might even allow someone to take our lives. So what? They can't take us away from him. All that would mean is that I'd be getting to heaven a little more quickly than I had anticipated. I'm good with that.

Another limitation that earthly governments have is that they can't be everywhere. Yes, our naval fleet is gigantic and can patrol the world's oceans, but even the mightiest aircraft carrier takes time to get from place to place. Sometimes our government issues warnings not to travel to a particular country. If you do and something happens to you, their not going to send in the Marines to get you back.

Jesus doesn't have that problem either. Micah says that "**he will be great to the ends of the earth.**" That definitely has been fulfilled! You would struggle to find many people who have never even heard about Jesus. Both believers and unbelievers alike all over our country are preparing to celebrate Christmas, which I

always find interesting. Maybe all people do is use his name as something to yell when they are surprised, but they know his name. You can't say that about many other historical figures.

Of course he is only truly great in the hearts of believers. We define the Kingdom of God as "Christ's rule in our hearts by faith." He's not just a great historical figure to us. He's not just an excuse to give and receive presents on the 25<sup>th</sup>. We certainly don't want to just yell his name. He means everything to us. He is our one and only Savior. He gives our lives meaning and purpose. He is the reason we know we will be in heaven eternally. Everything we do, everything we say, we do for him.

Finally Micah writes, "**<sup>5</sup>This one will be their peace.**" Six words in English, only three in Hebrew, but I don't know if more comforting words have ever been spoken. In the verses immediately after this text, God promises to give his people peace from the Assyrians who were threatening them. Isaiah told them the same thing. Yes, the land would be ruled by a succession of foreign powers, but God would keep his people safe so that he could keep his promise of sending a Savior through them.

More importantly, Jesus has given us peace with God. God hadn't declared war on us. Humanity declared war on him at the fall into sin. Every sin committed is another shot fired in that war. Only Jesus could bring it to an end. He did that by taking the punishment we had earned on himself on the cross. So God's justice is satisfied and his love is free to forgive us and welcome us into his family.

Through Jesus we have peace with each other too. Believing in him completely changes the way that we look at people. They aren't just random faces who are in our way at this particular moment. Every one of them is so precious to Jesus that he died for them. That means that they are precious to us as well. He even gives us peace with ourselves. Whenever our consciences scream at us, Jesus is right there to assure that that sin is forgiven too. We shouldn't blame ourselves when God made us blameless.

Today we've asked some Christmas Questions. We've asked who will the Savior be and what will the Savior do? It's good to know the names of the Old Testament prophets. They are so much more than a bunch of names in the table of contents in front of the Bible. They are men blessed by God to point us to Jesus. Their words prove to us that Jesus is exactly the Savior we need.