

Ephratha Emanates Excellency

Christmas 2020

HBC 12/20/20

Micah 5:1-5

Let your mind imagine the picture describes in Luke 2:1-20, the familiar portion of Scripture which takes us to Little Town of Bethlehem and the quiet hills nearby. I want us to think back to centuries before that night and let the Spirit of God teach us afresh about what we celebrate under the banner of "Christmas."

I. **Three Essentials of Jesus' Origin (5:1-2)** A. **The Right Geography**

Micah 5:1: *Now muster yourselves in troops, daughter of troops; They have laid siege against us; With a rod they will smite the judge of Israel on the cheek.*

Micah prophesied for about 20 years, leading up to the time just before the first wave of Jews were taken into captivity by the Babylonians. He was given this prediction of a siege that would come against Jerusalem much later. Micah was predicting there would be a call for Judah to muster her troops to defend against the siege. It was considered an honor to defend Jerusalem, and each town that could, would send 1000 warriors to join the army defending Jerusalem. But there was one town near Jerusalem which would not be able to muster 1000 men to fight. The little town of Bethlehem.

Bethlehem was a tiny, inconspicuous place no one usually paid attention to. But Micah takes time in his prophecy to address this tiny town, promising that it will have a unique honor. In Micah 5:1 is one of the gleaming nuggets of the minor prophets: the provenance of the Messiah.

Do you realize how spectacular this is? God gave this prophecy 700 years before Jesus was born. And He chose Bethlehem, rather than the likely place any Jew would expect, Jerusalem. The reason God predicted the geographic origin of the Messiah was because no one can control where he or she will be born. God chose a small town, a small clan, to limit the number of people who can make claims to the title of Messiah.

The Jews understood this. Christ's birthplace was a matter of dispute during his lifetime.

John 7:40-43: *Some of the people therefore, when they heard these words, were saying, "This certainly is the Prophet." Others were saying, "This is the Christ." Still others were saying, "Surely the Christ is not going to come from Galilee, is He? Has not the Scripture said that the Christ comes from the descendants of David, and from Bethlehem, the village where David was?" So a division occurred in the crowd because of Him.*

A birth certificate would have settled this. But they assumed that because he grew up in Nazareth, he must have been born there. It showed a combination of willful ignorance, and laziness about finding the truth.

B. The Right Genealogy

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. His goings forth are from long ago, From the days of eternity.”

That word **Ephrathah** refers to a clan or family unit within the tribe of Judah, and they came from Bethlehem. The Messiah not only had to meet a geographic qualification, He also had to have the right genealogy. Look at what God promised to David:

*2 Samuel 7:12-16: “When your days are complete and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your descendant after you, who will come forth from you, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be a father to him and he will be a son to Me; when he commits iniquity, I will correct him with the rod of men and the strokes of the sons of men, but My lovingkindness shall not depart from him, as I took it away from Saul, whom I removed from before you. Your house and your kingdom shall endure before Me forever; your throne shall be established **forever**.”*

So we know the Messiah must come from the line of David, and be born in Bethlehem. But God does not use the word **forever**, lightly. He promised that David's line (from *Bethlehem, Ephrathah*) would rule God's people **forever**. For that to happen, you need an unbroken succession of kings, OR ... one King who would rule forever.

C. The Right Generations

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. His goings forth are from long ago, From the days of eternity.”

This also made the Messiah unique. He would be **from long ago**. How could a ruler exist before he was born? He'd have to be eternal, and no one is eternal **except God**. Look what Jesus said when challenged by leaders of the Jews as to who He was:

John 8:58–59: Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born, I am.” Therefore they picked up stones to throw at Him, but Jesus hid Himself and went out of the temple.

Jesus is who He claimed to be. We have His birth certificate in the Scriptures. Micah 5:1-2, verified and fulfilled in the New Testament record, is indisputable. **But there's more!** Not only did Micah record the birthplace and nature of the Messiah so He could be recognized, he also recorded the description of the unique work He would do, and it was all written down **over 700 years before He was born**. But Micah also gives a description of the unique work he would do—the Messiah's prerogative.

II. **Three Essentials of Jesus' Work** (5:3-4)

A. **Shepherd His People**

Micah 5:3–4a: Therefore He will give them up until the time When she who is in labor has borne a child. Then the remainder of His brethren Will return to the sons of Israel. And He will arise and shepherd His flock In the strength of the LORD, . . .

This talks about the timing of his coming. The timing is simply promised for *after the judgment*. They had no idea it would be hundreds of years after the judgment. The judgment was going to hurt, but would not mean God was permanently rejecting His chosen people. They would be restored eventually. The first aspect of His job description: He will be a **shepherd**.

John 10:14–15, 19–20: I am the good shepherd, and I know My own and My own know Me, even as the Father knows Me and I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep.” . . . A division occurred again among the Jews because of these words. Many of them were saying, “He has a demon and is insane. Why do you listen to Him?”

The pushback was because they knew what Jesus was claiming. And He did exactly what He said He would do. He actually laid down his life for his sheep. When you see someone doing the work of the Messiah, that’s a good indication that he is the Messiah.

B. **Glorify God**

Micah 5:4: And He will arise and shepherd His flock In the strength of the LORD, In the majesty of the name of the LORD His God. . . .

He was the shepherd, but only by the strength of the Father and for the majesty and the glory of the Father. Jesus said:

John 8:50: But I do not seek My glory; there is One who seeks and judges.

C. **Protect His People**

Micah 5:4–5: And He will arise and shepherd His flock In the strength of the LORD, In the majesty of the name of the LORD His God. And they will remain, Because at that time He will be great To the ends of the earth. This One will be our peace. When the Assyrian invades our land, When he tramples on our citadels, Then we will raise against him Seven shepherds and eight leaders of men.

This was a confusing credential of the Messiah. There are many prophecies that say the Messiah will protect his people. There are many that speak of His glorious reign in His kingdom. But when Jesus came, he made no physical defense of himself, let alone his followers. He even promised the disciples that they would face persecution and be

executed for his name. He said *"I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves."* How is it possible for the Messiah to come and suffer, die, and allow persecution for his followers AND come and rule and conquer and reign? Well, either there are two Messiah's OR there is one Messiah who comes twice!

We know that in Christ's first coming he came to suffer and die, not to defend or be defended. But in his second coming he will come to conquer and rule, and then he will guard his people from all physical harm.

To truly celebrate Christmas isn't a matter of anything less than turning from your sin, putting your trust in Jesus' death on the cross for you, and giving glory to God for all that you have in Him, including perfect protection of your soul for eternity. I know we're stuck with that label for this holiday, but I wish I could change it. The French word **Noel** is better, because it means *"to be born."* Another possibility is **Nativity**, which is the same thing. Your nativity is the moment at which you become a **native** of the place where you are born.

I have no problem with most of the facets of what has come to be known as Christmas, as long as we focus on the birth of the Savior. What a great opportunity to teach children about the plan of God! Just please don't perpetuate lies about Santa Claus and flying reindeer. There is no such thing as a pseudo-omniscient, pipe-smoking jolly old elf who can violate the laws of physics, and who rewards and punishes children on a works-righteousness system.

We have something so much better! We have so much to celebrate! Feasting is appropriate. Singing is appropriate. Giving gifts as an expression of our joy and fellowship is appropriate. Reading God's word is appropriate. Praising Him is appropriate, because we celebrate nothing less than that arrival into human history of the one who died so that we can be forgiven and reconciled to God, and sharing in His life, which we call **eternal life**.

Does the God of glory, creator of heaven and earth, have your full trust? Are your sins forgiven by His grace, through Jesus Christ? Standing in that grace is how to honor Him with true worship as we celebrate the birth of His Son, our Savior.