

The Hope

SESSION GOALS

Every session has specific goals—things you want your group to walk away knowing, feeling, and committing to do.

Main Idea: The Hope of Advent reminds us that, despite difficult times, our loving, gracious, and compassionate God has not forgotten about us.

Head Change: To recognize that our most pressing need is often not our deepest need.

Heart Change: To keep hope in God during the low points in life.

Life Change: To stay patient amid the present pain without losing confidence in God.

OPEN

Name one of your top five Christmas movies. Describe one low point of a main character in that movie.

We often gravitate to Christmas movies that present a situation which appears hopeless and in which the main character feels helpless. In those low points, a Christmas miracle usually occurs.

Just as scriptwriters have authored the miraculous turnarounds in Christmas movies, the Author of human history wrote an amazing reversal of fortune into the script of humanity. Micah was given the words to share this message of hope, and it came during a particularly low point in Israel's history.

In this session, Jason Turner, pastor of Mississippi Boulevard Church in Memphis, TN, explores the hope of Advent proclaimed to Israel hundreds of years before the Messiah's arrival. That hope can be embraced by us, reminding us that no situation is too bleak when God is at work.

READ

Read Micah 5:2-5.

WATCH

Before viewing the session, here are a few important things to look for in Jason Turner's teaching. As you watch, pay attention to how he answers the following questions:

What painful experience did Micah tell Israel was going to happen?

Why would Micah's prophecy to Bethlehem bring hope to Israel in the face of judgment?

Show Session 1: *The Hope* (14 minutes).

DISCUSS

Jason explained in his teaching that Micah brought a negative report of coming judgment to Israel. This was a decidedly low point in the nation's history. Another nation would invade and wreak havoc on the land. Nestled in this prophecy is a tiny ray of hope: the obscure town of Bethlehem would be the source of a future King whose reign would reflect the Lord's majesty.

What do Micah's prophetic words to such an obscure little village say about God's care?

GOD GIVES US HOPE AT THE LOW POINTS OF LIFE.

Read Micah 5:1.

Jason explained the historical context of Micah's prophecy, that Israel was experiencing "an extended season of suffering, despair and pessimism."

What low points was the nation of Israel facing?

***Note:** To learn more about the context of Israel's coming judgment, go to **Go Deeper Section 1** at the end of this study.*

Although the leadership in Israel had failed, and many people did not follow God, there were surely people to stayed faithful to God. Nevertheless, they were caught up in the judgment of the nation. **What behaviors do you find in our culture today that concern you?**

Read Micah 5:2.

God determined to bring His grace – unearned favor – to Israel during its coming low point. Despite the awaited judgment, God had already sovereignly planned a hope-filled solution. A promised ruler would come. Unlike the corrupt leadership in Micah's day, this future King would rule justly. **Describe a time when you found encouragement during a low point in your life.**

God's Word is a source of comfort to us when we are at the lowest points in life. **What promises in the Bible bring hope to you during your low points?**

GOD'S PROVISION OF HOPE IS FOR THE UNCOMFORTABLE SEASONS OF LIFE.

Read Micah 5:2-3.

True prophecy will often contain painful truths. The promise of the future King did not prevent the devastating invasion of the Syrian army. Jason explains, “The expression, ‘He shall give them up until the time when she who is in labor has given birth,’ is to be understood that God is going to turn His people over to their enemy.” Judgment would indeed come, due to the people’s guilt before God. **When have painful consequences helped you grow and improve?**

The future may be bright, but the present is often painful. These verses in Micah remind us to keep an attitude of patient endurance. Some are entering the holiday season – a time considered to be joyful and celebratory – while facing struggles in relationships, finances, mental health, or other crises. Some face the holidays while holding strong memories of painful holidays past. **What current issues or memories threaten your ability to express joy and hope this holiday season?** **How can Micah’s promise of hope remind you to exhibit patient, hopeful endurance?**

GOD OFFERS HOPE FOR OUR DEEPEST NEED, NOT JUST FOR OUR MOST IMMEDIATE NEED.

Read Micah 5:4.

If you were an Israelite hearing Micah’s prophecy of a coming King, you would likely enjoy descriptions of this warrior’s prowess on the battlefield. The primary image that Micah uses is of a shepherd. Although this description likely did not fit their expectations, they nevertheless probably found comfort in this description of the coming King. **Why would a description of a kingly shepherd recall for Israel a wise and highly regarded king?**

Note: To further discuss the relationship between a king and shepherd in Israel’s history, go to **Go Deeper Section 2** at the end of this study.

The Assyrian army was not Israel’s biggest concern. They had been plagued by sin for countless generations. God’s plans were not to turn away a temporary enemy but the one that has lingered since the Fall in the Garden of Eden. Jesus identified Himself as “the good Shepherd” in John 10:11. Micah explains that the people would “dwell secure,” explaining that this Shepherd would “be great to the ends of the earth.” **How has this been fulfilled through Jesus the Messiah?**

Read Micah 5:5.

Micah explains that the coming Shepherd would not simply bring peace but would *be* their peace. The description of invading Assyrians finds a relationship to various calamities that have taken place throughout history and even to hopeless situations we face. God has offered hope by meeting our actual need in Jesus, the Shepherd whose very presence is a source of peace.

How will you let the peace of Jesus’ presence bring you hope this season?

LAST WORD

Just as Israel could look back to David the shepherd-king and forward to a future Shepherd-King, we can see the hope that Jesus brought with His first coming while awaiting His second coming. In this sense, we find ourselves in a similar situation as the original hearers of Micah’s prophecy. God’s past faithfulness helps His children retain hope in His future faithfulness, despite present difficulties we may experience.

The Advent season brings us this hope. When we go through a dark season, our gracious, compassionate God reminds that He has not forgotten about us. Our Savior Jesus was sent to satisfy God’s justice and take the sins of the people on Himself. Because of this, you and I have the hope of living forever in the presence of God in His heavenly kingdom. We will dwell securely in peace with Him.

GO DEEPER

The Go Deeper section has two potential functions. It can supplement your small group discussion by providing extra discussion material. We've highlighted a place where each of the following segments could fit in the Discuss section of the study guide.

But you can also use these sections as short devotionals to carry you through the week until your next group meeting.

1. Israel's Coming Judgment

Read the following passages and discuss these questions:

- What judgments are described against Israel in Micah 1:1-6?
- What sins are described in Micah 1:7; 2:1-2, 8-9; 3:11?
- In what ways do Micah 2:6-7; 3:9, 11 indicate that the people turned a blind eye to their own sins and warnings from God?
- How can we remain sensitive to our own lives and respond to the first instance of our own sin?

2. Israel's Shepherd King

The most famous – and most beloved – king of Israel was David. This young shepherd boy was such an unexpected candidate for the king that when the prophet Samuel was sent to his father Jesse's house to anoint one of his sons as the next king, Jesse did not bother sending for David!

Read 1 Samuel 16:1-13 and answer these questions:

- Why do you think Jesse did not think David would be selected by God as Israel's next king?
- How does the seeming insignificance of David find a parallel in the insignificance of his hometown, Bethlehem?
- When you read about God bringing great things from seemingly insignificant sources, what does it reveal to you about God's character and plan?
- How might the accounts of David and Bethlehem remind you not to overlook others?

Read Psalm 78:70-72 and answer these questions:

- How are the roles of a shepherd and a king similar?
- Why are both moral uprightness and practical skillfulness required to lead well?

Read Psalm 23. This passage was written by David the shepherd-king about the Lord – and ultimately about Jesus, the promised Shepherd-King from Micah 5:2-5.

What brings you the most comfort about David's description of Jesus our Shepherd?