

Micah 5:1-4 “Getting Ready for Christmas, with Micah’s Help”^{**1}

Main Idea: As we get ready for Christmas, Micah can help. Micah teaches us that the coming of the Messiah is all about two important realities.

- I. According to Micah, Christmas is about man’s need.
 - A. Micah gave a message of judgment (ch 1-3).
 - B. Micah gave a message of hope (ch 4-5).
 - C. Micah repeated his message of judgment and hope (ch 6-7).
- II. According to Micah, Christmas is about God’s provision (5:1-4).
 - A. Micah foretold the *place* of the Messiah (2a).
 1. It is small in size.
 2. It is great in significance.
 - B. Micah foretold the *person* of the Messiah (2b).
 1. He is God's representative.
 2. He will be Israel's ruler.
 3. His origin is eternal.
 - C. Micah foretold the *preparation* for the Messiah (3).
 1. There will be judgment.
 2. There will be a regathering.
 - D. Micah foretold the *purpose* of the Messiah (4).
 1. He will shepherd His people.
 2. His people will abide in His greatness.

Make It Personal: Consider two questions...

1. Is the Messiah your shepherd?
2. Is your life a reflection of His greatness?

Scripture Reading: Matthew 2:1-12

In a letter I received last week from *The Friends of Israel*, Jim Showers shared the following:

Recently I was in Nazareth, the village where Jesus lived until He began His ministry. While there, I was reminded of an important promise God fulfilled when He sent His only begotten Son to Earth

Most people are not aware that olive trees don’t come from the pits found inside olives. To reproduce, the root of an olive tree must send up a shoot, called a *netser* in Hebrew. The shoot is like a small branch; and it must be severed from the tree, along with a small portion of the root, and replanted for a new olive tree to grow.

Nazareth derives its name from the word *netser*. But what does that have to do with the birth of Jesus Christ, which took place in Bethlehem about 100 miles to the south?

Speaking of the coming Messiah more than six centuries before His First Advent, Isaiah prophesied, ‘There shall come forth a Rod from the stump of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots’ (11:1). The word we translate as ‘branch’ is the word *netser*.

Was it a coincidence that Jesus grew up in a town named for the branches that spring from the roots of olive trees? Of course not. God placed Jesus in a village

^{**}Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

¹ Adapted from messages at WBC on 12/8/96 and 12/19/04.

named after the *netser* to point us to the truth Isaiah prophesied more than 2,600 years ago.²

We know the Christmas story. That cannot be said of millions around the world, but it is true of us. The story of Christmas is well-known to us. We hear it every year.

But this year, to help us appreciate the life-changing implications of the incarnation, I want us to take a look at it from a not-so-well-known vantage point. I want to invite one of the prophets to help us get ready to celebrate the Savior's birth.

Micah. Though he lived 750 years before the event, the prophet Micah teaches us that the Messiah's first coming is all about two important realities.

My guess is that most of us have heard very few messages from the prophetic book of Micah, yet the gospel writer Matthew cites this man of God as an authority on the coming of the Messiah.

What does Micah teach us about Christmas? Two vital realities. One, Christmas is about man's need. And two, Christmas is about God's provision.

I. Christmas is about man's need.

The prophet Micah ministered in the eighth century BC. He was a contemporary of Isaiah, both serving in the southern kingdom of Judah. It was a time in Israel's history when God's chosen people enjoyed much economic affluence, but at the same time, exhibited an attitude of spiritual apathy. Under the leadership of Jeroboam II in the north, and Uzziah in the south, the territories of the divided kingdom spread and became almost as extensive as they were back in Solomon's day.

On the outside, Israel and Judah appeared strong, but it was a impressive facade. Underneath the fancy trimmings an internal decay was sapping their strength and destroying the social fabric of these nations.³ Indeed, although the people of God still had their religious system in place, there seemed to be less and less a connection between their religious and secular lives.

Sound familiar? We are living in an secularized society which is ignoring God's truth. That's what Micah faced, and it was his task as a prophet to deliver God's message to His wayward people. What did Micah say to his peers? His book is the record of the sermons he preached in Judah more than seven centuries before Christ. In it we see in living color *the need of mankind.*

Before we look at what Micah said about the Messiah, I want to map out the big picture of his book, a task which is not as easy as you might think. Martin Luther once commented regarding the books the prophets wrote, "They have a queer way of talking, like people who, instead of proceeding in an orderly manner, ramble off from one thing to the next, so that you cannot make head or tail of them or see what they are getting at."⁴

Let's do a quick overview of Micah's message. In his book, Micah essentially delivered three messages.

² Jim Showers, *The Friends of Israel* letter, December 2016

³ McComiskey, 395

⁴ cited by Allen, 257

A. Micah gave a message of judgment (ch 1-3). Notice 1:2-3, “Hear, O peoples, all of you, listen, O earth and all who are in it, that the Sovereign LORD may witness against you, the Lord from his holy temple. Look! The LORD is coming from his dwelling place; he comes down and treads the high places of the earth.”

God was fed up with the sin of His people and announced He was going to take action. In the latter half of chapter one, He predicted that a time of wailing and mourning was coming (1:8), the reasons for which are given in chapter two. Judgment is coming.

How do you think Micah’s people responded to that kind of sermon? Not too well. In fact, false prophets told him he was wrong and shouldn't say such things (2:6).

I'm intrigued by how Micah described the fickleness of his people (2:11), “If a liar and deceiver comes and says, 'I will prophesy for you plenty of wine and beer,' he would be just the prophet for this people.”

Did you catch that? Micah said a preacher could be a scoundrel, but if he offered wine and beer to the people, they would love him! The resemblance with our day is frightening, for in our society people applaud the preacher who tells them what they want to hear, who gives them a message that makes them feel good. It was to such people that Micah delivered a message of judgment in chapters 1-3.

3:12 “Therefore because of you, Zion will be plowed like a field, Jerusalem will become a heap of rubble, the temple hill a mound overgrown with thickets.”

In addition to judgment Micah preached about a second theme...

B. Micah gave a message of hope (ch 4-5). A shift occurs in chapter 4 as Micah turns from the immediate to the more distant future. Notice the beginning of 4:1, “*In the last days.*” Yes, judgment was inevitable and Micah preached about it, but that didn't mean God had thrown in the towel on His people. Things would change. When? In the “last days.”

4:1—“*In the last days* the mountain of the LORD’s temple will be established as chief among the mountains; it will be raised above the hills, and peoples will stream to it.”

In chapters 4-5, Micah offers his people a message of hope. What kind of hope? He announced that a day is coming when God's worship will be central in the world, as described in 4:1-3.

In that day, many nations will come and say, “Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths.”

In that day, God's Law will prevail (2).

In that day, warriors will beat their swords into plowshares and “nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore (3).”

In that day, there will be prosperity and God will be honored (4-5).

Judgment is coming, says Micah, but he also preached the theme of hope, announcing that after God finishes His work of judgment, He will bring restoration to His people and to the world. This work that God will do is the hope of His people.

C. Micah repeated his message of judgment and hope (ch 6-7). He uses a courtroom analogy and declares in 6:2, “Hear, O mountains, the LORD’s accusation; listen, you everlasting foundations of the earth. For the LORD has a case against his people; he is lodging a charge against Israel.”

God reminds His people that He had redeemed them from Egypt to be His people, but since they had rejected Him, He would take action to judge and purify them.

And how did God say He would do it? Who would be the agent of this divine plan? Who would come to restore God's people, and how would Israel identify this Deliverer? God answered those questions through Micah in the text before us this morning, Micah 5:1-4.

My friend, you will never understand the meaning of Christmas until you look through Micah's eyes and see this first reality, *the need of mankind*. Christmas isn't about trees and parties. It's about *need*, OUR need.

The writer⁵ of *It Came Upon the Midnight Clear* put it this way in the third verse:

*And ye, beneath life's crushing load, whose forms are bending low,
who toil along the climbing way with painful steps and slow;
Look now! for glad and golden hours come swiftly on the wing;
O rest beside the weary road and hear the angels sing.*

Do you feel the crushing load of sin in your life? Are you gripped by your own sense of inadequacy, your *need*? If so, you are prepared to experience the real meaning of Christmas. And if not, if you haven't felt the crushing load of sin in your life and you aren't gripped by the fact of your spiritual inadequacy, then you will not appreciate Christmas for what it is.

The week before Thanksgiving more than 170,000 people heard the good news of Jesus in a three day crusade in Yangon, Myanmar. That in itself is an amazing work of God after five decades of military rule which severely limited evangelism in a country that is 88% Buddhist.⁶

But just five years ago Myanmar, formerly Burma, became a democratic state, and that opened the door for what God accomplished four weeks ago. From all over the country Christians boldly invited their non-believing friends and loved ones to come. Churches across the nation chartered over 400 buses.

Franklin Graham tells what happened:

Each night after I preached the Gospel, I invited people to put their faith and trust in Jesus Christ. It takes courage to make a public commitment in a culture that has been hostile to Christianity, but more than 7,500 left their seats to come forward. The response was so great on that first night we didn't have nearly enough prayer counselors. I know of one counselor who talked and prayed with 15 different people...

One 33-year-old man, who earns his living pedaling a three-wheeled trishaw (a bicycle with a sidecar for passengers), came forward during the invitation on the first night. He had known nothing about the meeting—he was simply passing by on the street hoping to pick up a fare when he heard my voice over the PA system as I talked about God's offer of forgiveness. He immediately slipped into the crowd to listen because, he told a prayer counselor, "I am a very sinful man." The counselor explained who Jesus Christ is and what He did on the cross and then helped him understand repentance.

⁵ Edmund Sears

⁶ According to the 2014 census.

“When I prayed,” the man said afterward, “my sins were forgiven. I feel free, like a burden has been released from my shoulders.”⁷

Friends, that’s precisely what Micah announced nearly three millennia ago. Christmas is about man’s need. And until we feel that burden on our shoulders this man just described, we’ll never appreciate what God did to take it away.

II. Christmas is about God’s provision (5:1-4).

More than 700 years ahead of time, Micah predicted that God would provide for the need of mankind. The Lord would do something for sinners that they couldn’t do for themselves. He would send a mighty Deliverer into the world.

But how would they recognize him? Here’s how. In the first four verses of chapter five, the Lord through Micah made four predictions about the Messiah.

A. Micah foretold the *place of the Messiah* (2a). The context is set in verse 1, “Marshall your troops, O city of troops, for siege is laid against us. They will strike Israel’s ruler on the cheek with a rod.”

Micah is describing an event that eventually happened in his own lifetime, a crisis in fact.⁸ In 701 BC the city of Jerusalem came under siege. The “ruler” of which he spoke was King Hezekiah. The Assyrian enemy had “struck him on the cheek,” a symbolic sign of gross insult.

That was a sad time for the Jews, a fearful time. Their capital city was under attack and their king was being humiliated. In the midst of this threat to Jerusalem, with the Davidic ruler unable to do anything, Micah gave his people a prophecy about a coming ruler who would be born in Bethlehem.

Verse 2, “But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small [KJV ‘though thou be little’] among the clans of Judah [KJV ‘among the thousands of Judah’], out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins [KJV ‘whose goings forth’] are from of old, from ancient times [KJV ‘from everlasting’].”

With destruction facing Micah’s people, the Jews, God gave Him a glimpse into a future hope, a hope that would come from the village of Bethlehem Ephrathah. He emphasizes a couple of things about this village.

1. *It is small in size.* KJV—“But thou, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though thou be *little* among the thousands of Judah.” God’s Word is very precise about this qualification. There were two Bethlehems in ancient Israel—one in Judah (1 Sam 16:4) and one in Galilee (Josh 19:15). Micah clearly states that the Deliverer is going to come from Bethlehem in Judah. Ephrathah is the ancient name of Bethlehem, the town in which David was born.

I say *town* because Bethlehem was not a city, like Jerusalem, but a small village a few miles south of the capital. In terms of size, it’s small. However...

2. *It is great in significance.* And here’s why. This small village is going to be the birthplace of the Messiah. Concerning Bethlehem, God announced (2), “Though you are small...out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel.”

⁷ BGEA newsletter, December 2, 2016; see also <https://billygraham.org/story/more-than-46000-flock-to-franklin-graham-festival-in-myanmar/>

⁸Peter Craigie, *Twelve Prophets*, Vol. 2, p. 39.

Just think of how this sounded to Micah. Jerusalem is going to be invaded, and its present leader insulted by a slap on the face. But God said a new ruler would be born in *Bethlehem*.

That's sort of like saying Oak Hill or South Shore. *Bethlehem*? One Old Testament scholar observes that Bethlehem Ephrathah was the smallest, most insignificant clan in Judah.⁹ The word Micah uses in verse 2 is not the regular Hebrew word for "little" or "small" but a rarely word intended to call attention to the trifling or insignificant. That was Bethlehem, an out of the way "burg."

Yet in God's plan, that would be the birthplace of the Messiah.

Do you know what Matthew did when he quoted this text from Micah? He changed the word. Listen carefully to Matthew 2:6, "But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, *are by no means least* among the rulers of Judah."

Small, yes, but oh so significant!

B. Micah foretold the *person of the Messiah* (2b). What kind of person would this coming ruler be? We learn three things about him from Micah.

1. *He is God's representative.* Notice the little prepositional phrase God uses in His prediction in verse 2, "But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah...out of you will come *for Me* one who will be ruler over Israel." The KJV says "come forth *unto Me*." Yahweh is speaking and says, in essence, "The coming Messiah will be My representative. He will accomplish My plan. He will come for Me."

2. *He will be Israel's ruler.* Verse 2 says specifically that He will be "the ruler in Israel." It's as if Micah is saying that Israel's present ruler was too weak and embarrassing to the reputation of God. The only solution was for a new king to be born, not in Jerusalem (which was too corrupt for Micah), but in Bethlehem where the line of David began.

Micah foresees a new beginning for the kingdom of God.¹⁰ Rooted in God's past covenant promises, but anticipating something wonderfully new.

3. *His origin is eternal.* "Whose origins are from of old, from ancient times [lit. 'from everlasting days']." I should point out that nowhere does Micah call this coming ruler *Messiah* (in fact, the word is rarely used in the Old Testament). But the words "whose origins" [KJV "whose goings forth"] come from a Hebrew phrase that has a military connotation. It referred to the departure of an army for battle. Here we learn that unlike Israel's helpless present king, the coming ruler would be a powerful conqueror.

What would make Him so different? Micah says it pertains to His unique origin, His eternal origin. Micah anticipated a supernatural figure, just like Isaiah did when he wrote in Isaiah 9:6, "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace."

Let this sink in. As you're preparing for Christmas, is this the person you have in mind? Are you gripped by the realization that the babe who was in the manger is the very representative of God, the ruler of Israel, and the Eternal One who had no beginning and

⁹ Ralph Smith, p. 43.

¹⁰Ralph Smith, p. 44.

will have no end? This is the true Christ of Christmas, and knowing Him truly is eternal life.

Micah makes a third prediction. The place, the person, then...

C. Micah foretold the *preparation* for the Messiah (3).

So answer this. When did Micah say the Messiah would come? Did he say he would come right away? No, actually he predicted a couple of things had to happen first by way of preparation.

That's verse 3, "Therefore Israel will be abandoned until the time when she who is in labor gives birth and the rest of his brothers return to join the Israelites."

Here's the first preparatory act.

1. *There will be judgment.* "Israel will be abandoned." So before the Messiah will come (as predicted in verse 2), Israel will go through a period of abandonment by God because of her sin. For the northern kingdom, that act of judgment happened in 722 BC when the Assyrians deported ten of the tribes of Israel. And though the southern kingdom survived the scare of 701 BC, its day of judgment inevitably came at the hands of the Babylonians in 586 BC.

Micah predicted, "Israel will be abandoned." And so it happened.

How long did Micah say this abandonment would last? "Until the time when she who is in labor gives birth." Some interpreters see Mary the mother of Jesus in this prediction. It's more plausible to see the picture of birthing as a metaphor speaking of Bethlehem. In verse 2, Micah said the Ruler would come out of Bethlehem. This would happen after the period of judgment on Israel, and this time of abandonment would end when the Messiah was brought forth by Bethlehem.

But something else will happen too, according to Micah.

2. *There will be a regathering.* "And the rest of his brothers [KJV 'the remnant of his brethren shall'] return to join the Israelites." This is a common theme for the prophets. Yes, God will judge His people, but He won't forget them. He will restore a remnant of Jews through which He will fulfill His covenant promise with Abraham.

Has this happened yet? Yes *and* no. Did God bring a remnant of Jews back from exile to the land of Israel? Yes, as we see in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. But is the regathering complete? Have the rest of the brothers returned," as Micah said they would?

No, only a small remnant returned. So why this apparent discrepancy in Micah's prophecy? It's because Micah, like the other prophets, did not clearly distinguish that the Messiah would come *twice*. The ultimate regathering of Jews is still future, and will occur in connection with Messiah Jesus' second coming. And that seems consistent with passages like Jeremiah 31-33, Ezekiel 36-37 and others, including Romans 11 in the New Testament, which speak of God's intent for Israel in the future.

D. Micah foretold the *purpose* of the Messiah (4). What exactly did Micah predict the Messiah would do when He came? In verse 4 he mentions two things.

1. *He will shepherd His people.* "He will stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God." Now there's a short but vivid description of the Messiah's purpose. What will Messiah do?

"He will stand." Micah probably has in mind the typical Jewish coronation ceremony. The royal prince would stand beside a pillar in the temple to be anointed in God's presence and installed as king by the people. The coming ruler will be a great king.

“And he will shepherd his flock.” Sometimes the Old Testament says the LORD God will “shepherd” His people (Micah 2:12; Ps 23) and sometimes it says the Messiah will “shepherd” His people (Micah 5:4). There is no inconsistency for the Messiah *is* the LORD God. Yahweh *is* Jesus.

Dear friends, right here is precisely what sinners like us need. We need a shepherd, someone to protect us, to provide for our needs, to guide us, to rescue us when we get stuck, to lead us through the valleys of life, to discipline us when we become unruly, and even at times, to mend our wounds. We need a shepherd.

And here's the good news, my fellow sinners. We *have* a shepherd, the one Micah predicted, who said, “I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd gives His life for the sheep (John 10:11).”

This is such good news. What we need is what we have, because God provided it for us. We have a shepherd.

But Micah tells us something else about Messiah’s purpose. He informs us how Messiah’s people will respond to their Shepherd.

Verse 4b, “And they will live securely, for then His greatness will reach to the ends of the earth.” The AV says, “And they shall abide: for now shall he be great unto the ends of the earth.” The ESV reads, “And they shall dwell secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth.”

In other words...

2. *His people will abide in His greatness.* Has this happened yet? Do God's people live securely because the greatness of their Shepherd extends to the ends of the earth?

The answer is *yes and no*. Does Jesus the Messiah reign as king in this world? He does, but for now only His people see Him and submit to His rule.

But the day is coming when His kingdom will arrive in full splendor, when He will reign with a rod of iron, and His greatness will extend to the ends of the earth. “Every knee will bow and tongue confess,” says Paul in Philippians 2, “that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (verses 10-11).”

This is the Messiah’s purpose for coming. To shepherd a people who will abide in His greatness. That’s what He’s going to do when He returns, for all to see. That’s what He is already doing in the lives of His people.

And they will live securely.

Does that describe your life? Are you living securely, and is the reason for your security the greatness of your Shepherd?

Friends, when Jesus is great His people rest secure. He will be great to the ends of the earth, and then the world will know security as its never known it.

And even now, when Jesus is great in our lives, we rest secure. We *live* securely, with a security that comes, not from having money in the bank, or good health, or a righteous government, but security that comes from knowing we belong to a Shepherd. To the Shepherd who so loved us that He came into this world as tiny baby, grow into full manhood, and gave His life as a ransom payment for us, conquered death, returned to His throne in heaven, sent His Spirit to seal and secure us until He returns, and even now works through us to spread His knowledge to a world that needs Him.

This is what Christmas is all about, God's gift to a besieged world, a Ruler who was born in an obscure village called Bethlehem who came to save a people and be their forever Shepherd.

This is Christmas through the eyes of Micah, and it leads us to ask two questions.

Make It Personal: Consider two questions...

1. *Is the Messiah your shepherd?* Have you accepted God's gift? To be more specific, Micah would ask us, is the Lord Jesus your shepherd? Have you asked Him to save you from your sins and lift the burden of your guilt from your shoulders?

2. *Is your life a reflection of His greatness?* Are you trusting your Shepherd in every area of your life? That's how we reflect His greatness. We give Him our problems, because we know He can solve them. We give Him our time, our possessions, our all, because He's done so much for us and we want Him to be great in other people's lives.

Phillips Brooks wrote the words to a familiar Christmas hymn that talks about the city that Micah predicted. Micah looked ahead to Bethlehem. Let us look back to Bethlehem this morning and give our worship to the Ruler Who was born there.

Hymn of Response: #141 "O Little Town of Bethlehem"

Before we rush from this holy moment and move into the fast-pace of the Christmas bustle, I want to give you the opportunity to solidify decisions the Word of God has prompted you to make this morning. I invite you to spend time right now praying to the Living God. Thank Him for sending His Gift to the world. Tell Him of your desire to allow Him to be your shepherd. Affirm your aspiration to make Him great in your life.

Time for Response in Prayer