

WHEN PEACE COMES TO BETHLEHEM

Third Sunday in Advent

December 15, 2024

*But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah,
though you are small among the clans of Judah,
out of you will come from me one who will be ruler over Israel,
whose origins are of old, from ancient times
And he will be their peace.*

Micah 5

Introduction to Micah 5

1. The big picture: Micah 7:18-20
 - 1) Micah prophesied in Judah during the reigns of Jothan, Ahaz and Hezekiah, making him a contemporary of Isaiah.
 - 2) Micah's message: God will bring judgement upon a sinful nation, but restoration will follow which will point forward to the Messianic kingdom.
 - 3) Micah's question: Will we recognize the Messianic ruler and his forever kingdom?
2. A brief history of Bethlehem Ephratha
 - 1) The story of suffering and sovereignty in Bethlehem:
 - begins in Genesis 35:16-10 with the death of Rachel;
 - continues in Judges where it is both the home of Izban (Judges 12:8-10) and figures in a great evil (Judges 19);
 - continues in Ruth 4:11-22 with Roth and Boaz;
 - includes 1 Samuel 16:1-13 where David is anointed by Samuel;
 - and 2 Samuel 23 where Bethlehem figures prominently in the story of David's Mighty Men.
 - 2) Micah 5 sets the stage for God's to providentially arrange for Jesus to be born in Bethlehem. See Matthew 2 and Luke 1-2.
 - 3) Matthew identifies Herod's slaughter with the both Rachel's loss Judah's captivity (see Jeremiah 31:35).
 - 4) Bethlehem continued to be important, as a Christian pilgrimage site and a place where violence has extra significance.

Putting the *analogia scripturae* to work: Micah 5:1-5

¹⁰ Marshal your troops, O city of troops,
for a siege is laid against us.

They will strike Israel's ruler
on the cheek with a rod.

² "But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah,
though you are small among the clans of Judah,
out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel,
whose origins are from of old, from ancient times."

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.

⁴ He will stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the Lord,
in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God.
And they will live securely, for then his greatness
will reach to the ends of the earth.

⁵ And he will be their peace.

1. Hermeneutic keys for reading the prophets

- 1) Always begin with a commitment to read all Scripture as God's inspired word
- 2) The prophets are preparing God's people for Messiah in their message of judgement and restoration
- 3) Piper's Golden Rule: "Read the author as you would have the author read you." The context is especially important in this text –
- 4) Leave room for one promise with multiple fulfillments – but here the promise must fit both Micah's "near" and Matthew's "far" settings.
- 5) Pronouns are very important in this text.

2. Micah is writing to a community which sees the reality of the Assyrian siege engine. The near setting is the challenge of 8th Century BC geopolitics and the miracle of the return from captivity.

3. The "ruler" is the Davidic Messiah, reflecting David's small start (see 1 Samuel 16)

4. Micah emphasizes the past and future history of this ruler

5. Like Isaiah, Micah hints that this ruler will have "ends of the earth" implications

6. The key question: How will I recognize the King?

¹⁸ Here ¹⁰ He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. ¹¹ He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. ¹² Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—
¹³ children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

¹⁴ The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

John 1

Looking for that King from Bethlehem

¹ *This After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem ² and asked, “Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him.”*

³ *When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. ⁴ When he had called together all the people’s chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Christ was to be born. ⁵ “In Bethlehem in Judea,” they replied, “for this is what the prophet has written:*

⁶ *“ ‘But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;
for out of you will come a ruler
who will be the shepherd of my people Israel.’ ”*

Matthew 2

1. God brings astrophysics, Hebrew influence on ancient Eastern cultures, Old Testament prophecy, rabbinic studies and redemptive history together in

¹⁷ *To these four young men God gave knowledge and understanding of all kinds of literature and learning. And Daniel could understand visions and dreams of all kinds.*

¹⁸ *At the end of the time set by the king to bring them in, the chief official presented them to Nebuchadnezzar. ¹⁹ The king talked with them, and he found none equal to Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah; so they entered the king’s service. ²⁰ In every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king questioned them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters in his whole kingdom.*

²¹ *And Daniel remained there until the first year of King Cyrus.*

Daniel 1

2. Herod can’t bring himself to say the word “king,” but he seems not to realize that he uses an even more powerful title, Christ

“The Lord declares to you that the Lord himself will establish a house for you: ¹² When your days are over and you rest with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, who will come from your own body, and I will establish his kingdom. ¹³ He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.”

2 Samuel 7

3. The teachers know Hebrew Scripture, but they show no interest in meeting this new ruler

4. Herod represents the Cain line, opposition to God’s redemptive plan (others in this line: Haman, Antiochus IV, Nero and Domitian, Hadrian and Diocletian,

¹⁵ *“A voice is heard in Ramah,
mourning and great weeping,
Rachel weeping for her children
and refusing to be comforted, because her children are no more.”*

Jeremiah 31 (See the fulfillment in Matthew 2:18.)

Living in the promise

1. God will reveal which are the true “brothers” to join

²⁶ You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, ²⁷ for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. ²⁸ There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. ²⁹ If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.

Galatians 3 (See Romans 11:22-24 for the grafting image.)

¹⁰ In bringing many sons to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering. ¹¹ Both the one who makes men holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers.

Hebrews 2

2. This Messiah really is my King!

My brother, hast thou submitted to the sway of Jesus? Is he ruler in thine heart, or is he not? We may know Israel by this: Christ is come into their hearts, to be ruler over them. "Oh!" saith one, "I do as I please, I was never in bondage to any man." Ah! then thou hatest the rule of Christ. "Oh!" says another, "I submit myself to my minister, to my clergyman, or to my priest, and I think that what he tells me is enough, for he is my ruler." Dost thou? Ah! poor slave, thou knowest not thy dignity; for nobody is thy lawful ruler but the Lord Jesus Christ. "Ay," says another, "I have professed his religion, and I am his follower." But doth he rule in thine heart? Doth he command thy will? Doth he guide thy judgment? Dost thou ever seek counsel at his hand in thy difficulties? Art thou desirous to honor him, and to put crowns upon his head? Is he thy ruler? If so, then thou art one of Israel; for it is written, "He shall come to be ruler in Israel."?

Spurgeon’s “The Incarnation and Birth of Christ” (Sermon included below.)



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