

THE STEP INTO BETHLEHEM

Micah 5:2 But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting.

The prophet Micah came from a small village in the territory of Judah called Moresheth-Gath (Micah 1:14, 'possession of Gath'), about twenty-five miles southwest of Jerusalem. He is referred to by Jeremiah, **Jer. 26:18** Micah the Morasthite prophesied in the days of Hezekiah king of Judah, and spake to all the people of Judah, saying, Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Zion shall be plowed like a field, and Jerusalem shall become heaps, and the mountain of the house as the high places of a forest. ... See also, **Micah 3:12** Therefore shall Zion for your sake be plowed as a field, and Jerusalem shall become heaps, and the mountain of the house as the high places of the forest.

He lived during worrying times when Assyria was menacingly hovering over the nations like a 'black cloud'. He prophesied during the reigns of King Jotham (750-735 BC), Ahaz (735-715 BC), and Hezekiah (715-686 BC). God had much to say to the nation because Micah, Isaiah, Amos and Hosea were all prophets at that time.

Micah's prophecy is neatly divided into three messages (chs. 1-2, 3-5, 6-7). The first message (chapters one and two) was a warning to both Judah and Israel of God's impending judgment. They had 'pushed Him too far'. This divine judgment ultimately came upon the ten northern tribes of Israel in 721 BC when Assyria defeated Israel, and in the south when Jerusalem and Judah were conquered by the Babylonians over one hundred and twenty years later (597-586 BC). Before the invaders desecrated the land, Micah pleaded with his people to return to the Lord. However, the people refused to listen and repent.

The problem was that the society in Judah was rapidly changing because of the wealthy investors buying up small family farms and developing them into large land holdings. There was plenty of money ... but it was in the bank accounts of the few. This meant the poor could not afford their land any longer and the rich were 'paying pennies' for it, as we say.

This was a burden heavy on the heart of Micah because he himself came from the farming community, **2:2** they covet fields, and take them by violence; and houses, and take them away: so they oppress a man and his house, even a man and his heritage.

Just before the final section (chapters six and seven), - where God calls upon His people to trust Him, - the second section (chapters three to five) contain a promise of a coming Deliverer. The country was in social and economic decline created by greed and crooked dealings, ... but there was even a more fundamental underlying concern, Micah 3:4 Then shall they cry unto the LORD, but he will not hear them: he will even hide his face from them at that time, as they have behaved themselves ill in their doings. 5 Thus saith the LORD concerning the prophets that make my people err ... For many years, the priests/clergy had been leading the people away from God, and God shut Himself off from them, v.7 for there is no answer of God. ... It is a proven Biblical pattern that when God is not given His place, and He continues to appeal to the people judgment upon the nation is inevitable ... and His judgment often hits them where it affects them most ... *in their pockets!*

These were indeed dark days ... and God promised they would become even darker, 3:12 Therefore shall Zion for your sake be plowed as a field, and Jerusalem shall become heaps, and the mountain of the house as the high places of the forest.

When God begins to 'roll out' His judgment, no one can stop Him; the psalmist declares, Ps. 33:8 Let all the earth fear the LORD: let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him. ... And that is a call to the people of God to stand up and to stand out for Him, - to be separate and distinctive ... and for their faithfulness, God promises to reward them,

2:12 I will surely assemble, O Jacob, all of thee; I will surely gather the remnant of Israel

4:7 And I will make her that halted a remnant, and her that was cast far off a strong nation: and the LORD shall reign over them in mount Zion from henceforth, even for ever.

5:3 then the remnant of his brethren shall return unto the children of Israel.

5:7 And the remnant of Jacob shall be in the midst of many people as a dew from the LORD.

5:8 And the remnant of Jacob shall be among the Gentiles in the midst of many people as a lion among the beasts of the forest, as a young lion among the flocks of sheep

7:18 Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? he retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy.

Indeed, the Lord never leaves His people without a blessed hope and wonderful promises. In chapter four He introduces an assurance for them, 4:1 But in the last days it shall come to pass, that the mountain of the house of the LORD shall be established in the top of the mountains, and it shall be exalted above the hills; and people shall flow unto it. 2 And many nations shall come, and say, Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, and to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for the law shall go forth of Zion, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. 3 And he shall judge among many people, and rebuke strong nations afar off; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up a sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. 4 But they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree; and none shall make them afraid: for the mouth of the LORD of hosts hath spoken it. 5 For all people will walk every one in the name of his god, and we will walk in the name of the LORD our God for ever and ever. 6 In that day, saith the LORD, will I assemble her that halteth, and I will gather her that is driven out, and her that I have afflicted; 7 And I will make her that halted a remnant, and her that was cast far off a strong nation: and the LORD shall reign over them in mount Zion from henceforth, even for ever. 8 And thou, O tower of the flock, the strong hold of the daughter of Zion, unto thee shall it come, even the first dominion; the kingdom shall come to the daughter of Jerusalem. 9 Now why dost thou cry out aloud? is there no king in thee? is thy counsellor perished? for pangs have taken thee as a woman in travail. 10 Be in pain, and labour to bring forth, O daughter of Zion, like a woman in travail: for now shalt thou go forth out of the city, and thou shalt dwell in the field, and thou shalt go even to Babylon; there shalt thou be delivered; there the LORD shall redeem thee from the hand of thine enemies. 11 Now also many nations are gathered against thee, that say, Let her be defiled, and let our eye look upon Zion. 12 But they know not the thoughts of the LORD, neither understand they his counsel: for he shall gather them as the sheaves into the floor. 13 Arise and thresh, O daughter of Zion: for I will make thine horn iron, and I will make thy hoofs brass: and thou shalt beat in pieces many people: and I will consecrate their gain unto the LORD, and their substance unto the Lord of the whole earth. 5:1 Now gather thyself in troops, O daughter of troops: he hath laid siege against us: they shall smite the judge of Israel with a rod upon the cheek. 2 But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting. ... *that is our verse*, v.2 But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting.

This is a wonderful passage of Scripture, some of which has already been fulfilled and some of which is yet to be fulfilled to the glory of God. But let's align our New Testament minds to this passage for, of course, Micah 5:2 is quoted in Mt. 2:5. When the wise men came to ask Herod where Christ was born they caught him unawares and he had to seek advice from his chief priests and scribes. They told him, In Bethlehem of Judaea: for thus it is written by the prophet, And thou Bethlehem, in the land of Juda, art

not the least among the princes of Juda: for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel. This is the Christ ...

THE INSIGNIFICANT CHRIST

Bethlehem ... Bethlehem, though, as far as many was concerned was ‘off the map’. It was off the major road from Jerusalem southwards. It was the kind of place if you arrived in it, you had somehow become lost ... or you might as well have been lost! It was somewhere out in the hills of Judea. ... It belonged to the tribe of Judah, **I Chron. 4:1** The sons of Judah; Pharez, Hezron, and Carmi, and Hur, and Shobal. **2** And Reaiah the son of Shobal begat Jahath; and Jahath begat Ahumai, and Lahad. These are the families of the Zorathites. **3** And these were of the father of Etam; Jezreel, and Ishma, and Idbash: and the name of their sister was Hazeleponi: **4** And Penuel the father of Gedor, and Ezer the father of Hushah. These are the sons of Hur, the firstborn of Ephratah, the father of Bethlehem.

Jerusalem, on the other hand, was the place to be. Jerusalem had the temple, it had all the priests and all the dignitaries. It was the place of influence. If you wanted to be somebody, Jerusalem was the place to live. Jerusalem was a centre widely respected and loved throughout the land ... but *Bethlehem ... Bethlehem* was simply a place you would pass through.

Granted ... it had history. Jacob buried his wife Rachel near there (Gen. 35:16-19). Ruth and her husband Boaz lived near Bethlehem. The family home of King David was in Bethlehem. Yes, it had history ... but it had long since been *scored* from the memories of many people in the land. It had little significance.

Yet, here is what God did ... He sent His Son into this world, - to Bethlehem, a little part of His creation, - ... and He sent Him into an obscure back-street dwelling that was attractive to no one. ... The affluent wise men of the east asked Herod where the Child was born because common sense would have led you to a place of influence ... like a palace, ... but definitely you never would have thought of Bethlehem.

Yes, you would find your shepherds there ... and you would get people who couldn't afford to live in Jerusalem ... and those who would not fit into Jerusalem society ... and Bethlehem was the insignificant place God saw from Heaven's throne and where He planned His Son would breathe

the first breaths of earth's air. ... Into a thoroughly insignificant place came **the insignificant Christ**. ... Yes, if they had known He was the Messiah, the promised Deliverer of His people, the people of Bethlehem would have accepted Him. ... But there was nothing spectacular about Him ... **the insignificant Christ** ... Jn. 1:10 He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. ... Just like the place He was born into. ... *Bethlehem* ... synonymous with small, doesn't count, past its best, finished, ... That is where Jesus was born. ... **The insignificant Christ**. ... v.2 But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah,

THE INCOMPARABLE CHRIST

Before He left Heaven, He was surrounded by angels praising and glorifying Him, and yet He set it aside for a season to enter this world into almost complete oblivion. He Who was the *heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds* (Heb. 1:2), He left behind Heaven's riches and its wealth. He left its comforts ... and He 'stripped' Himself of His privileges and was born into the humblest setting, - that is what our Saviour did for us when He left the glories of Heaven.

He left behind Him Heaven's Throne. He, - Heb. 1:3 *Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, - laid aside the glory the angels continually brought to Him ... He set aside His crown, to be laid in a cradle, and to die on a cross.*

Here is how He had been addressed, ... Heb. 1:8 *unto the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom. ... 10 And, Thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth; and the heavens are the works of thine hands: 11 They shall perish; but thou remainest; and they all shall wax old as doth a garment. And yet, - in the will and plan of God, - as He entered this realm of 'time' ... Heb. 2:9 we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man. ... He became as man, Phil. 2:6 being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: 7 But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men.*

There was nothing that required Him to come to Calvary. He did not have to die on a cross. True, there would then be no way to escape God's

wrath ... but Jesus was not bound to die on Calvary, - it is not as if He *owed* us something, ... He is not compelled to give us anything good! ... And it was not as if He had no other choice because He could have planned *not* to come into this world, and *not* to die on the cross.

He is absolutely **incomparable** in more ways than we could imagine. He is God, and God is infinite, and God is immeasurable, and God is beyond our human comprehension. ... Paul says He is the blessed and only Potentate [*prince, person of royal authority*], the King of kings, and Lord of lords (I Tim. 6:15), John says He is the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end (Rev. 1:8), and Jude describes Him as the only wise God our Saviour (Jude 25). ... And this same God spoke to the little **insignificant** town of Bethlehem through Micah, *yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel.*

Yes, Jesus came to the nation of Israel for God's glory. Every time a sinner is saved from their sin, it is all for God's glory. ... Christ's agenda is God's Glory. When He was born in Bethlehem it was to God's glory. When He lay in the arms of His mother, the shepherds and then later the wise men from the east looked upon Him, they saw God's glory ... It is what John wrote about too, Jn. 1:14 *we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.* And no matter how often John saw His Master in those earlier times, - even long into old age, - he continued to long to see Jesus again, I Jn. 3:2 *we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.* ... That is because **the insignificant Christ** to the world is **the incomparable Christ** to His redeemed people ... and He is also ...

THE INESTIMABLE CHRIST

... He *whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting* (Micah 5:2). This affirmation teaches us the Lord Jesus defies all the restraints the limited human mind places upon Him. He is greater than anything we can imagine ... He is from everlasting to everlasting, His Name is higher than any other, He laid the foundations of this earth, there is none beside Him, - He is the one and only true God. ... He is immeasurable, unfathomable, unsurpassable ... All the universes cannot contain Him. He is greater, wider, higher, deeper!

He is **inestimable** ... and yet, He came into this world ... for the reason that *He* so loved the world, that [*God*] gave his only begotten Son, that

whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. *That is the reason Jesus came.* ... “My God is so big, so strong and so mighty” ... and yet He took on our human form. Every beast of the forest is His, said the psalmist, and the cattle upon a thousand hills (Ps. 50:10). ... He declared, v.12 the world is mine, and the fulness thereof, ... and yet He humbled Himself to become a man, Mt. 8:20 the Son of man hath not where to lay his head. He started at the beginning, - as a little Baby, in a little town where only those invited would notice Him.

He existed in eternity before He was born to Mary ... and He is once again seated in eternity on the Throne reserved for the King of kings. Eternity will never exhaust the wonder and amazement of His people as they gaze upon Him. We shall never become tired of Him. Every moment will be so fresh ... as if it were our first in Heaven. When we describe the Lord Jesus Christ as inestimable ... it is impossible for us to find any place to begin, and any place to end. It is impossible because He is *from everlasting*.

CONCLUSION v.2 But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting. ... Bethlehem was the place God *physically* took the step out of eternity and into the world. There was no earth-shattering explosion to herald His arrival, or no parade along the high street of Jerusalem. ... He simply came as **the insignificant Christ**.

The incomparable Christ. There is none other like Him, and never will be for He is the Son of God, *He is God*. ... You will never find His equal. ... He is **the incomparable Christ**.

And He is also **the inestimable Christ** for He is from everlasting to everlasting. He never changes and neither does His will or His ways ... Stepping out of eternity ... the step which took Him through the portals of time and laid Him in the cradle, - God’s wonderful plan of redemption ... “Jesus, my Saviour, to Bethlehem came, Laid in a manger to sorrow and shame; Oh, it was wonderful, blest be His Name!” Amen.