

## **An Ancient Christmas: The Coming of Jesus in the Old Testament — The Ruler**

**Micah 5:1-5**

**By [Dr. J. Ligon Duncan III](#)**

The Reverend If you have your Bibles, I'd invite you to turn with me to Micah chapter 5, and we're going to look at verses 1 to 5 together tonight, as we continue in our series, "An Ancient Christmas: The Coming of Jesus in the Old Testament." Before we read this passage together, I want to tell you just a little bit about Micah and his ministry. Micah is known to us as Micah of Moresheth. Many of the prophets are known to us by their father's name, but Micah is identified by the town that he comes from. He apparently lived in a little town about twenty-two miles southwest of Jerusalem where farmers did their work. And so he ministered and came from among the farmers of Israel. His name means, "Who is like Yahweh?" or "Who is like the Lord?" If you notice the very end of the book, Micah chapter 7 verse 18, the book ends with a question, "Who is a God like You?" and that is a play on Micah's name. His very name means, "Who is the Lord? Who is Yahweh?" And his ministry highlights the character and the actions of the Lord. And so the book ends with the question, "Who is a God like You?"

Micah ministered in Judah. You remember, there were two kingdoms at this time — the northern kingdom and the southern kingdom — and he ministered in the southern kingdom. And he did so under the reign of the Judean kings, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah. Now about the same time that Micah was ministering, there were two older and more famous prophets ministering. In the northern kingdom, Hosea was ministering; in the southern kingdom, Isaiah was ministering. Isaiah and Hosea were older than Micah and certainly more well-known than him, but they were ministering at the same time. I will say this, though, if you look at Jeremiah chapter 26 verse 18, the elders of Israel quote Micah and they indicate that Micah's prophecies had influenced good king, Hezekiah. Isn't that something? That in the Bible there is witness to the fruit that was borne in the heart of a king from the preaching of this faithful prophet, Micah? I don't think that there is anything that a pastor could more want than fruit to be borne in the hearts of his people through the faithful preaching of the Word and to have that recorded in God's book. And that's recorded. No matter if Micah ministered in the shadow of much more famous ministers, his preaching bore fruit in the heart of God's king, Hezekiah.

Micah preached, and you will see this if you scan the book, on God's judgment

and on God's forgiveness. And he very bravely addresses the specific sins of both Israel in the north and Judah in the south. He speaks about the idolatry of God's people, and we know, for instance, under Ahaz that was a huge problem. He speaks of the way that they wrongly seized other people's property, he speaks of the failure of the government leaders, he speaks of the failure of the priests, and he even speaks of the failure of many of the prophets in his day. He speaks about the corrupt business practices of the people in Judah and the violence that existed there. It's very interesting that Micah was ready to address public and corporate sins of God's people as well as their personal sins in his preaching. He held up before their eyes the character of God and he said that both their sins and the character of God required that God bring judgment against them. And he also speaks of a Shepherd-King who will gather and deliver a remnant of His people. And in the passage tonight, he will speak of a new David who will come even from a region under Assyrian control and deliver His people.

Well looking at the passage we're going to study tonight, I want you to be on the lookout for six things in these five little verses. First of all, in verse 1, you're going to hear Micah tell his people to prepare for the siege of the Assyrians. Then, in verse 2, he will call them to hope for a promised ruler. Then in verse 3, he tells them that they will be delivered into the hands of their enemies until that promised ruler comes. In verse 4, he tells that that promised ruler, when he comes, will stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the Lord. And again, he says that his greatness will be to the ends of the earth. And then finally in verse 5, he says that he will be their peace. He will be their wellbeing.

Well let's pray and read together from Micah chapter 5.

*Heavenly Father, we bow before You at the end of Your day thanking You that we can be here. There are so many that would love to be in the house of the Lord and they're unable to be. And we're thankful that You have, in Your kindness, granted that we would be here with Your people under Your Word hearing it proclaimed, singing Your praises, lifting up prayers, hearing the words of the catechism in our ears, and receiving these things and pondering them in our hearts. We thank You for this. We pray that You would make Your Word, read and proclaimed, to be a means of grace to Your people and that You would bless our hearts in preparation for Christmas, even as we anticipate the truth of Your Word about the coming of the Savior from Your Old Testament prophets. We ask all these things in Jesus' name, amen.*

This is the Word of God. Hear it:

Now muster your troops, O daughter of troops; siege is laid against us; with a rod they strike the judge of Israel on the cheek. But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose

coming forth is from of old, from ancient days. Therefore he shall give them up until the time when she who is in labor has given birth; then the rest of his brothers shall return to the people of Israel. And he shall stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God. And they shall dwell secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth. And he shall be their peace. When the Assyrian comes into our land and treads in our palaces, then we will raise against him seven shepherds and eight princes of men.

Amen, and thus ends this reading of God's holy, inspired, and inerrant Word. May He write its eternal truth upon all our hearts.

Micah lived about a hundred or a hundred and fifty years before the events that we were recounting this morning. As Ezekiel ministered from Babylon in the days of the exile in the 590's and 580's and so on, Micah ministered in the time of the fall of the northern kingdom and on the verge of the invasion of the Assyrians. And so once again we have a prophecy of the coming of Christ in the Old Testament that occurs in the context of an impending crisis, an invasion of God's people by their enemies. And in this section, Micah is setting forth a new hope that will dawn for God's people, even in the midst of the darkness of this crisis of the invasion of the Assyrians. He points, in this whole section that really stretches from chapter 4 verse 8 all the way to chapter 5 verse 15, of Jerusalem's restoration among the nations and God's Messiah intervening and winning victory on behalf of His people. And in the passage before us right now he speaks of a Shepherd-King who will arrive and who will restore His people; a new hope for Israel. Well let's look at the passage together tonight.

## **PREPARE FOR THE SIEGE OF THE ASSYRIANS**

I want to walk through each of these verses and especially I want to draw your attention to verse 2 and verse 5. The first thing that Micah says is that God's people are going to be invaded and their king is going to be dishonored. Look at what he says in verse 1. "Now muster your troops, O daughter of troops; siege is laid against us." He is preparing his people for the invasion of the enemy. And he goes on to say, "With a rod they shall strike the judge of Israel on the cheek." Now that's a picture of dishonoring a ruler. If you backhanded a ruler, if you smote a ruler in days of old on the face, that was a sign of great disrespect. This is of course referring to Sennacherib's treatment of Hezekiah. The judge of Israel, the king of Israel, Hezekiah, would be mocked, you will remember, by Sennacherib. And here, Micah is warning the people that that is exactly what is on the way. He's telling the people the truth. It's an uncomfortable truth, it's a truth that no one would want to proclaim to the people of God, it's not unlike those uncomfortable truths that Jeremiah was always proclaiming to the people of God, but he tells them the truth. Invasion is coming and their king is going to be humiliated.

## HOPE FOR A PROMISED RULER

But in the wake of this dire situation, this impending invasion, he gives them a word of hope, and I want you to see that word of hope in verse 2. “But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel.” That's very interesting; David was the unlikely king that came from Bethlehem. Now, Micah is saying, “It may seem unlikely, but a new David is going to come from Bethlehem and he is going to be the ruler in Israel.” Now here's the interesting thing — Assyria would occupy Bethlehem. They would never conquer Jerusalem but they would occupy Bethlehem. And Micah is saying, “From that Assyrian occupied territory, even Bethlehem, God, one day, is going to raise up a ruler for His people.”

And of course this is picked up on the New Testament. I want you to see two interesting things that we learn in the New Testament about this prophecy. In Matthew chapter 2, isn't it interesting that when Herod hears from the wise men, these Gentile princes who have come from the East, that they are coming because they have seen the star of the newly born king of the Jews, he immediately asks his own wise men, “Where is the Messiah supposed to be born?” and they all know? Look at Matthew chapter 2 verse 6, or verse 5 — “They told him, ‘In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet: ‘And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.’” Now here's the interesting thing I want you to note. If you've heard that passage read twenty Christmases, forty Christmases, sixty Christmases, you know that passage well. Whose lips is that passage quoted in? Are those words quoted by early Christians? No, those are Jewish interpreters of the Scripture saying that the Messiah is to come from Bethlehem. You're learning in this passage that the Jews in Jesus' day expected the Messiah to come from Bethlehem.

Now let me give you another example of that. Turn with me to John chapter 7. In John chapter 7, look at verse 40. “When they heard these words, some of the people,” and they're speaking about Jesus, “some of the people said, ‘This really is the Prophet.’ And others said, ‘This is the Christ.’ But some said, ‘Is the Christ to come from Galilee? Has not the Scripture said that the Christ comes from the offspring of David, and comes from Bethlehem, the village where David was?’” Now once again, these are Jewish people who are hearing Jesus preach and they all expect that the Messiah will come from Bethlehem. And at that point, all they know about Jesus is that He is from Nazareth of Galilee. It isn't early Christians who made up the idea that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem. Micah told us that and all the Jews in Jesus' day knew that the Messiah would come from Bethlehem. And Jesus was that Messiah. He was the ruler promised in Micah chapter 5 verse 2, and even His enemies and those who did not yet

believe in Him, recognized that the Messiah would come from Bethlehem.

## **DELIVERED INTO THE HANDS OF THEIR ENEMIES**

Now let's go back to Micah chapter 5 again and look at verse 3. Here again we see Micah predicting disaster. "Therefore he shall give them up until the time when she who is in labor has given birth." This is indicating that Israel will lose their king and will be in subjection to the nations until this ruler, who has been prophesied in Micah chapter 5 verse 2, appears in this world to reign. So Israel's captivity and subjection would continue until this ruler appears.

## **THE PROMISED RULER WILL SHEPHERD HIS PEOPLE**

Then verse 4. We're told that when the ruler comes, "He will stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God." So just like this morning, we see an emphasis on him being a Shepherd-Ruler, unlike the bad rulers that Micah and Ezekiel and Jeremiah and Isaiah criticized, he will be a ruler who really takes care of the sheep. He will be a Shepherd-King, a Shepherd-Ruler, and He will rule in the strength of the Lord. Also like the passage that we studied this morning in Ezekiel 34, it's the Lord Himself shepherding His people and He gives this ruler the strength to shepherd His people. But furthermore, look at the end of verse 4. "He will be great to the ends of the earth." He will not only rule over his people; he will rule over the Gentiles — "to the very ends of the earth."

## **THE PROMISED RULER WILL BE THEIR PEACE**

And finally in verse 5 we're told that "He shall be their peace." Just like this morning, where God promised a covenant of peace, just like we were reminded of the words of the angels to the shepherds, "Glory to God in the highest and on earth, peace," so this ruler will be our peace. It is certain that the enemies of our souls may prevail for a season in our lives, but when sin and Satan make their fiercest assaults, this ruler, promised in Micah 5 verses 2 and 5, this ruler will maintain and will provide our peace, and this ruler is Jesus Christ. He Himself is our peace. And it's very important for us to understand how He provides and maintains our peace when our souls are under assault.

## **PEACE BECAUSE THE MERIT OF HIS BLOOD**

And I want to mention very briefly four ways in which He does that tonight. First of all, He maintains our peace by the merit of His blood. You remember what the apostle Paul says? He says, "Who is he that shall condemn since Christ has

died?” When Satan, the accuser of your souls, speaks to you words of condemnation and says, “You deserve to die!” he’s right, but your answer is, “Christ has died for me, and by the merit of His blood, He takes what I deserve so that I receive what He deserves.” And by that word we respond to the accuser of our souls. And so Christ provides and maintains our peace by the merit of His blood.

### **PEACE BECAUSE OF HIS INTERCESSION**

Christ also maintains our peace by His intercession for us. In the very context of the events into which Micah was speaking and prophesying, you remember at one point when the Assyrians have invaded the land and both Isaiah and Hezekiah pray that the Lord will spare His people and He does, miraculously! You remember the Assyrian army abandoning their camp? Leaving by the tens of thousands? Israel being miraculously delivered in answer to the prayers of Isaiah and Hezekiah? “The effectual prayers of righteous men avail much. Well if that’s true, think of the effectual intercessions of the mediator, Jesus! He ever lives to intercede for you, and when you are groaning, unable to articulate words, He who ever lives to intercede is interceding for you. He provides and maintains your peace by the merit of His blood and by His prevailing intercession.

### **PEACE BECAUSE OF THE SUFFICIENCY OF HIS GRACE**

Third, Jesus provides for and maintains your peace by the sufficiency of His grace. You may feel as if you’re in circumstances that are beyond your capacity to endure. Paul certainly felt that way. Do you remember what he said? Through all those buffetings, through all those sufferings, through all those discouragements, his testimony was, “God has taught me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you because My power is perfected in your weakness.’” He provides and maintains our peace by the sufficiency of His grace.

### **PEACE BECAUSE OF HIS PROMISE**

And He provides and maintains our peace by the inviolableness of His promise. Do you remember what Jesus said? He said, “I will never leave you or forsake you. I will never leave you or forsake you.”

Now my friends, each of these things, each of these things in times of our experience are hard to believe; they really are. And the harder the situations that we are encountered, the harder they are to believe. So how do you get this peace which is so prevalently and evidently available to you through Jesus Christ? You must know Him. You must know Him. To acquaint yourself with Him is the way to peace. You must know Him and trust in Him if you are to experience

the peace that He offers. And it means our meditating on the merit of His blood and His prevailing intercession and His sufficient grace and His inviolable promise. It means meditating on those things until we believe them. He is our peace. Micah prophesied of a ruler who was to come from Bethlehem, a ruler who was going to be our peace.

On the night that Jesus died, He looked at His disciples and He said, "Peace I leave with you. Peace I give to you. Not as the world gives give I unto you; let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid. You believe in God, believe also in Me." He came for your peace, oh brothers and sisters. Do not walk through this world unnecessarily without a full sense of the peace you need because He knows you need that peace. And these promises were first made to people who were about to be invaded. You can start thinking about all the horrific things that came along with that invasion. Do you think that He doesn't know what you're going through right now? Do you think that He's unprepared or incapable of providing for your peace even in what you're going through right now? Oh friends, meditate on the One who is your peace so that your hearts can be kept in perfect peace. Let's pray.

*Our heavenly Father, there is no greater gift that could be given or received in this season than peace, total wellbeing. Donnie prayed tonight about circumstances that shake and rattle peace — unemployment, depression, family trials, marital struggles, worries over aging parents, worries over children, fears over finances, and a million other things, Lord. These peace-robbing things surround and are among Your people. And You have promised peace, peace that passes understanding, and You promised it in a Ruler who was born in Bethlehem who is our peace. Grant that all of Your people tonight will avail themselves of the peace that He is more ready to give than they are to grasp, and grant that any who are here tonight who do not know Him, who do not trust Him, will so trust Him, will so believe in Him, that they not only find salvation for their souls forever, but they find a peace that they could not otherwise experience here and now apart from Him. I ask this in Jesus' name, amen.*

Would you stand for God's blessing?

Peace be to the brethren, and love with faith, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, until the daybreak and the shadows flee away. Amen.

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