

# Micah 5:1-6

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] A number of years ago, a minister and his family opted for the questionable delights of Betty Hill on the north coast of Sutherland as their holiday destination. One of their teenage sons was less than impressed by what Betty Hill had to offer, and on the family's return home was asked what he made of Betty Hill, and his reply was nothing if not memorable, too much Hill and not enough Betty. Now, Betty Hill, no doubt, has its own charm, and if anybody hails from Betty Hill, then forgive me for suggesting otherwise, but it probably does qualify as the back of beyond, or certainly off the beaten track. Now let's transport ourselves back in time some 2,700 years to the southern kingdom of Judah and ask what little Judean village might fall into the same category as Betty Hill, somewhat forgettable and certainly off the beaten track. Well, one that would fit the bill admirably would be the little town of Bethlehem, charming, no doubt, in its own way, but hardly a tourist magnet. Certainly then, perhaps now it's different.

This would seem to have been the view of the prophet Micah, who makes an unexpected and intriguing reference to Bethlehem in his prophecy. We've read the verses in question. We mentioned them as we spoke to the children, and then we read them again in our reading. But you, Bethlehem Ephrata, that's the region within which Bethlehem was found, 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. Micah prophesied better days for Bethlehem. He prophesied concerning one who would be born in Bethlehem and who would become a ruler over Israel. And not just any ruler, but one whose rule would, as we read in verse 4, reach the ends of the earth, whose borders would extend way beyond the borders even of the golden era of David and Solomon. I want to consider this fifth chapter of Micah, a chapter that presents us with a king from Bethlehem, but also describes for us the citizens of Bethlehem, or the subjects of the king from Bethlehem. And the manner in which we hope to do some justice to the chapter is by this morning focusing our attention on the king from Bethlehem. And then this evening we will move on and consider the citizens of Bethlehem, or the subjects of the king from Bethlehem.

So what can we say of this king or ruler from Bethlehem that Micah prophesies? In order for us to better appreciate this prophetic announcement by Micah, we need to understand when it was made and what was going on in Judah at the time that Micah was prophesying. Now if you were here last Sunday morning, that would help a little as Micah was a contemporary of Isaiah, whose prophecy concerning the Emmanuel child we were thinking about last Sunday morning. They lived at the same time, and so what we said of the time in which Isaiah was prophesying largely will hold for this morning. But notice in the prophecy of Micah itself, notice how the book begins there in chapter 1, and in verse 1 we read, the word of the Lord that came to Micah of Moresheth during the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah. And I hope you recognize especially the second name there of Ahaz. Last Sunday morning we noticed how Isaiah was used of God to approach King Ahaz and to challenge him that Ahaz might put his trust in God rather than in the Assyrians with whom he was intent on entering into some kind of alliance.

Indeed, Ahaz was given the opportunity to ask for a sign, any sign, but he refused that opportunity, he refused that command to ask for a sign, but as we were thinking of, the sign was given, and nonetheless the sign of the virgin who would be with child and would give birth to Emmanuel. So, Micah is a prophet who was ministering, who was prophesying at the same time as Isaiah, at the same period in the history of Judah. So, though largely at the same time, it would seem that the prophecy that we are going to be thinking about this morning would have been a prophecy that was announced and presented probably some thirty years after Isaiah's prophecy of the child who would be called Emmanuel. And in due course we'll notice that there is some significance in recognizing the order of events, as it were, even in terms of the prophecies that are being announced. We can also endeavor to have a more precise time reference than simply the time reference we have at the beginning of Micah where we were told of three reigns covering, of course, many decades. There is a possibly more precise reference that we can find in chapter 1 of Micah and in verse 9. There we read, as Micah describes the condition particularly of Judah and the impending doom of Judah, we read, for her wound is incurable.

You know, the time for turning back had passed. Her wound is incurable. It has come to Judah. It has reached the very gate of my people, even to Jerusalem in itself. And though we can't state this with complete confidence, it seems reasonable to imagine that this could well be of reference to the Assyrians laying siege to Jerusalem under King Sennacherib in 701 B.C. The Assyrians, you remember, were the power that Ahaz had entered into an alliance with, little realizing, of course, that they would not respect that when it was no longer in their interest. And so, some decades have passed, and now Assyria is under a new king, and they lay siege to Jerusalem on this occasion. And it may well be that there in chapter 1 we have a very precise historical reference that allows us to place this prophecy more clearly. So, over Assyria reigned Sennacherib, and over Judah at this time, the king was Hezekiah. Hezekiah, who it has to be said, unlike his father Ahaz, was a faithful king, rather surprisingly, really, considering those who had gone before. So, that more or less helps us to locate ourselves historically in regards to when it is that Micah is prophesying.

[ 7 : 52 ] The message that Micah brings that in a very real way culminates in this announcement of a king to come out of Jerusalem. Well, if we try and briefly, but hopefully helpfully, lead into that announcement in chapter 4 by reviewing what comes before. The prophecy begins with God leveling a lawsuit against Israel and Judah. The language of a lawsuit can be noticed there in verse 2 of chapter 1, Hear, O peoples, all of you, listen, O earth, all who are in it, that the sovereign Lord may witness against you the Lord from His holy temple. And then it goes on to speak particularly of Samaria and Jerusalem, the capitals of Israel and Judah. So, the language that we have, the picture that has been painted by Micah is of God bringing a case against the nations of the world, but very particularly, a case against Israel and Judah, because of the manner in which they had sinned against Him, and had rebelled against Him, and had not kept the terms of His covenant with them. And so, that is how the prophecy begins and indeed continues. Chapters 1 and 2 speak of and describe the awful judgment to befall Israel and Judah as a result of their rebellion. In the case of the northern kingdom of Israel, that judgment was already a present reality at the time that Micah is writing. And in the case of

Judah, it is not a judgment that was still to come. And why the judgment? Why this judgment on the people of God? Well, Micah is not slow to identify the sins of the people, and especially of those who enjoyed a political and religious authority in Israel and Judah. And the sobering reality and picture is captured in a few choice words towards the end of chapter 3. Time doesn't allow us to go through all that is said, but at the end of chapter 3, we have, in a way, very helpfully summarized the situation that led to God bringing this case against His people. And notice what we read there at the end of chapter 3 of Micah, reading from verse 8, 1. Hear this, you leaders of the house of Jacob, you rulers of the house of Israel, who despise justice and distort all that is right, who build Zion with bloodshed and Jerusalem with wickedness.

2. Her leaders judge for a bribe, her priests teach for a price, and her prophets tell fortunes for money. 3. Yet they lean upon the Lord and say, 4. Is not the Lord among us? No disaster will come upon us. Therefore, because of you, and the you very much directed particularly to the leaders of the nation, the religious leaders, the prophets, the priests, and indeed others who exercised authority. Therefore, because of you, Zion will be ploughed like a field. Jerusalem will become a heap of rubble, the temple hill, a mound overgrown with thickets. So, we have this very sobering picture painted, very accurate but sobering picture painted of the moral condition of Israel and Judah. This despite the fact, as I commented a few moments ago, that Hezekiah as a king was a king in great measure who could be commended.

But at the end of these verses in chapter 3, you also have a helpful reference, I think, an undoubted reference to what would happen over a hundred years later when Jerusalem was destroyed.

In 586 BC, under Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians. And then in verse 12, the reference to Jerusalem becoming a heap of rubble, a temple hill overgrown with thickets. That was not the case when Micah prophesied. That was still not the case, but some hundred years later it would indeed be the case.

[ 12 : 32 ] And so, Micah looks forward. God, through Micah, speaks of what is to come, of the judgment that will be visited upon God's people by God through the nations that He would employ for that purpose.

But in the midst of this awful portrayal of impending doom and destruction, there is a ray of glorious light and hope in chapter 4. The chapter begins, in the last days. And so, as speaking of events that from the standpoint of Micah, the vision of Micah, the vision of Micah, we've done so already, we are conscious that even today there are elements of this prophecy that await fulfillment. But nonetheless, the vision serves as a present and permanent challenge to faithful service. So, even though Micah speaks of events that in his own day certainly were in the future, but some of them, even for us, still lie in the future. Nonetheless, he can conclude this glorious vision that chapter 4 begins with, with these words of challenge. In verse 5, all the nations may walk in the name of their gods. We will walk in the name of the Lord our God forever and ever. It's Joshua-like. As for me and my house, what others do, well, that's up to them. But what we will do is walk in the name of the Lord our God. And as we do, we can look forward to this glorious future that our God has promised us. Well, Micah then goes on in chapter 4, he goes on to make clear that the day he is prophesying concerning will follow times of severe judgment and suffering for God's people. There is talk there in verse 6 of the lame and of exiles. He speaks in verse 10 of the daughter of Zion, that is Jerusalem, writhing in agony. He makes explicit reference to exile in Babylon, even though he is writing over a hundred years before the exile took place, and indeed when Babylon was not yet a power that needed to be feared. And so you have this recognition in the part of Micah, yes, in the last days there is this glorious future awaiting, but these terrible events must come before.

And then once these events have taken place, then we can look forward to the fulfilling of this vision that he presents to God's people. Well, indeed, as we approach with some excitement the announcement of the king from Bethlehem, Micah then would appear to make a further reference to that awful day when Jerusalem would be destroyed that has been referred to already at the end of chapter 3, where we read there at the beginning of chapter 5 that Israel's book, that Israel's book, that Israel's book, and Israel's book is written by Israel, and there, though different ways could be understood in terms of exactly the reference there, it does seem reasonable that this is also a reference to that terrible day when Jerusalem was finally destroyed.

But then, following that final reference to that awful day of God's judgment on Jerusalem, immediately, in stark and in glorious contrast, we read what we find in verse 2, In contrast to this impotent king, we are then presented with this king who will come out of Bethlehem, whose rule would extend, we are told that in verse 4, to the very ends of the earth.

Well, what are we told concerning this king from Bethlehem that Micah announces? Well, Micah, with a little help from Matthew, tells us of his origins, he tells us of his time of appearing, he tells us of the identity of this king, he tells us of his mission, and he tells us of his kingdom.

[ 17 : 23 ] Well, think of these things, each of them very briefly. First of all, what does Micah tell us of the origins of this king that is announced? Well, the prophet identifies both a historic and a geographic origin, and we'll notice very swiftly that the two are connected.

First of all, what can we say of the historic origins of this announced king? Well, there in verse 2, we're told, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times.

What does that mean? What is Micah saying? Well, some argue that this suggests, or even requires, that the prophesied king enjoys eternal origins. You'll notice there the footnote.

In the NIV at the bottom, there's an alternative translation offered for the phrase, from ancient times. And the alternative suggested is, from days of eternity.

And especially in the light of what we know, given Matthew's employment of this prophecy, some would be quick to say, well, yes, here the reference is to one whose origins are in eternity, and so therefore must be divine.

[ 18 : 33 ] And while that is one way of understanding what the prophet is saying, it is also certainly true that for any who heard this prophecy at the time that Micah delivered the prophecy, it is very difficult that they would have come to that conclusion.

What they would have concluded is that the one who is being announced is from ancient times. And the reference there being that he was one who would come from the ancient line of King David.

In that sense, from ancient times, one who was of the line and lineage of David, the great king. And from such a line, one would arise to reign over Israel.

Of course, the one who would follow in David's line is one who would not only reign in the measure and with the skill and the power of David, but would surpass David as a ruler and as a king.

He would, unlike so many of David's sons, he would be the one who would fulfill the promises that God gave to David concerning a son who would be born to him.

[ 19 : 52 ] Think of the words that are directed to David by God that we find in 2 Samuel 7. We read there, 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.

He is the one who will build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. And as we read these words, we imagine certainly until we come to the end of what God says to David, well, this sounds like Solomon.

Of course, in a measure, Solomon did indeed fulfill these words of promise that God gave to David, but then it speaks of one whose throne would last forever. And we realize that one greater than Solomon would be required to fulfill this promise that God gives to David.

And so, when we read here in Micah of a king whose origins are from of old, from ancient times, we think of one who would rise up from the line and lineage of King David.

There may be further significance in the language, but equally, we cannot say that with complete certainty. That in terms of his historic origins, but also the reference here very clearly gives a geographic origin for this king.

[ 21 : 16 ] Where would he come from? Well, the geographic origin fits seamlessly with the historic origin, for he will come out of Bethlehem. Now, though Bethlehem was, as Micah stresses, small among the clans of Judah, it was also the birthplace of King David.

And that this future prophesied king would come from Bethlehem was singularly appropriate. And so, there is a coming together of his historic and his geographic origin seamlessly.

They fit together this announced king of the line and lineage of David and who would be born in the town of David in the town of Bethlehem. So, Micah tells us something of the origins of this king from Bethlehem, but he also tells us concerning the time of his appearing.

For those who were listening to this prophecy, certainly those who were listening to it with seriousness and with genuine interest and concern, a question would be, well, when will this happen?

You know, when will this happen? When will this king come and deliver us? Well, Micah gives some indication concerning the time of his appearing in verse 3.

[ 22 : 30 ] We read there, 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.

When will this king appear? Well, Micah makes it clear that it will be following Israel's experience of judgment and seeming abandonment by God and will take place precisely when she who is in labor gives birth.

Now, at first sight, that is hardly a remarkable prophecy. When else could a child be born than when she who is in labor gives birth? But, of course, the significance of the language that Micah uses is that it echoes the prophetic language of Micah's contemporary Isaiah.

We made reference to that at the beginning. Isaiah, who roughly some 30 years before had prophesied of a young woman or virgin who would give birth to the child Emmanuel, a child that, as we also noticed last week, Isaiah goes on to describe in quite astonishing and remarkable terms.

And we would do well to remind ourselves of the language that Isaiah uses of a child to be born. In Isaiah chapter 9 and verse 6, For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders, and he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

[ 24 : 03 ] Of the increase of his government and peace, there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever.

And so when Micah, 30 years later, speaks of a child to be born, that the day of judgment would end at this precise moment when she who is in labor gives birth, surely Micah speaks of the same child.

And I say this not only in the light of Matthew's gospel and Matthew and the use that he makes of this prophecy, which establishes beyond any doubt that it is indeed the same child that Isaiah prophesies and that Micah prophesies, but I say this because Micah himself, and indeed any pious and well-instructed Israelite, would have or certainly could have made the same connection.

But there is one further reference to the time of his appearing, not only when she who is in labor gives birth, but we're also told that it will be connected with the brothers returning to join the Israelites.

There in verse 3, This could be a reference to the return of the Israelites from exile in Babylon.

[ 25 : 24 ] Of course, that occurred hundreds of years before the birth of Jesus, so perhaps more likely, it refers not so much to something that will happen immediately prior to the appearing of this king from Bethlehem, but something that will occur as a result of his appearing.

He will bring together into one people, into one family, his own, a spiritual Israel.

It's interesting that Paul in Ephesians would seem to be making deliberate allusion to Micah's prophecy in chapter 2, and we can just notice briefly how he does so.

We'll return to that this evening. But notice in Ephesians chapter 2, and especially in verse 14, the language that Paul uses, there he speaks of Jesus Christ, and he says, For he himself is our peace.

Words that echo what we read in verse 5 of Micah, and he will be their peace. So, there does seem to be a deliberate use of the prophecy, or allusion to the prophecy by Paul.

[ 26 : 29 ] But what particularly interests me is how, having made that very clear allusion, notice what he goes on to say that relates to this gathering together of his people into one.

Notice what Paul says in verse 19 of Ephesians chapter 2, And so here, when Micah speaks of the time of his appearing, as being a time when Israelites or the brothers will return to join together again.

The reference would appear to be to what will occur as a result of the coming of this king from Bethlehem. So Micah tells us something of his origins.

He tells us something of his time of appearing. But what of his identity? That's the big question, isn't it? Who is he? Who is this king from Bethlehem? Well, that Micah doesn't tell us.

Micah doesn't tell us who he is. And why doesn't Micah tell us who he is? Well, presumably because he doesn't know. Micah doesn't know who he is. Now, let's be clear. When I say that he doesn't know, he knows and he is assured, and there is no doubt in his mind that this king will come.

[ 28 : 05 ] And indeed, the knowledge that this king will come fills him with hope and with joy. There's no doubt in that regard. But as to the identity of the king, that is knowledge that Micah is not privy to.

And here, of course, Matthew comes to our aid. We've read in Matthew chapter 2 how Matthew employs this prophecy and identifies it as a prophecy that speaks of Jesus.

We don't need to read it again. The words are so familiar. Of course, we say that Matthew comes to our aid. In fairness, we should say that it's the chief priests and the teachers of the law who come to our aid, because it is they who, in answer to the question posed by King Herod to them concerning the birthplace of Messiah, they are the ones who say, in the light of their knowledge of the Old Testament Scriptures, they are the ones who say that the Messiah would come from Bethlehem.

And of course, Matthew, in recording the answer that the chief priests and teachers of the law give to Herod, Matthew grants to their answer a Holy Spirit-inspired seal of approval.

So, the identity of the king from Bethlehem, who is he? Well, of course, we know the king of Bethlehem is Jesus. He is the one who is promised and prophesied by Micah.

[ 29 : 38 ] But we move on to think of his mission. What is the mission of this king from Bethlehem as Micah understands it and as Micah presents it in his prophecy? And there we turn to verse 4 of chapter 5 of Micah, and there are two verbs at the beginning of verse 4 that allow us to establish his mission.

There are certainly those elements of his mission that we are presented with here in this prophecy. There in verse 4, the verse begins, he will stand and shepherd his flock.

These two verbs, stand and shepherd, helpfully, in a concise way, present to us or establish what the mission of this king is. You see, the language of he will stand is not to be understood simply as a reference to his posture on any given occasion.

Rather, it's the language of regal or kingly authority. He will stand. He will stand. This one who is being prophesied is a king, or as Micah has already stated explicitly, a ruler over Israel.

This is his mission, to govern, to rule, to reign. He's a ruler. He's a king. He stands with kingly and regal authority. He stands over his own people.

[ 30 : 58 ] Indeed, he will stand over all peoples as the one in whom resides all sovereign authority. So, he will come as a king to establish a kingdom, a very different kingdom to that envisaged, I imagine, even by Micah, but a kingdom nonetheless.

And as Jesus, the king from Bethlehem, began his ministry, what do we find at the very heart of his message? Indeed, the first occasion in Matthew's gospel where we're given an indication of the message that Jesus brings is in chapter 4 and verse 17.

And what do we read there? From that time on, Jesus began to preach. What is the summary of his message? Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.

So, his mission is as a king who has come to establish his kingdom. He will stand. But what are the second verbs? Because we read it there in verse 4, he will stand and shepherd his flock.

You see, Jesus was to be a very peculiar kind of king, a shepherd king. And when we say that, or describe him as a very peculiar kind of king, we're not to say that the notion of a shepherd king was altogether novel.

[ 32 : 16 ] Far from it. David, in whose line and lineage Jesus comes, David was the first shepherd king. We sang of that in Psalm 78. And David, as a shepherd king, represented, albeit very fallibly, but he represented his shepherd God.

What, after all, did David so memorably pen? The Lord is my shepherd. David was the shepherd king, and he represented and sought in some measure to point to his shepherd God.

And the king who was announced, the king from Bethlehem, yes, a king, but a shepherd king. A king who would care for and protect and shepherd his flock.

And of course, the language of a shepherd king is not language that is exclusive to Micah. His colleague and contemporary Isaiah uses similar language, indeed, in greater measure and very beautifully.

And we can just read what Isaiah says concerning this shepherd king. In Isaiah chapter 40 and verses 10 and 11, See, the sovereign Lord comes with power, and his arm rules for him.

[ 33 : 35 ] See, his reward is with him, and his recompense accompanies him. And then what do we read? Seemingly in contradiction, but far from being in contradiction.

He tends his flock like a shepherd. He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart. He leads those that have young.

The shepherd king. This is the mission of the king from Bethlehem. Yes, he will stand over his people. He will stand over the nations. But he will govern and he will reign supreme as a shepherd king who holds the lambs close to his heart.

And my friend, if you are trusting in Jesus as your shepherd king, he holds you close to his heart. The one who reigns supreme over the universe holds his own close to his heart.

This is his mission. And so we cannot continue. We cannot say more before asking the question, Is he your shepherd? Is he your shepherd?

[ 34 : 42 ] This king from Bethlehem. Have you put your trust in him as your shepherd? Can you sing, The Lord is my shepherd? Not just a shepherd, not just the shepherd, but the Lord is my shepherd.

My shepherd. He's the one who shepherds me. He's the one who governs over me. He's my shepherd, a king. So his mission is to establish his kingdom.

His mission is to shepherd his flock. But note also that he will conduct his mission, not in his own strength and authority, but, to use the language of Micah there in verse 4, in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God.

He comes sent by another, and he conducts and performs his mission, accountable to another, the one who ascends him.

But then finally, Micah speaks and describes for us, in brief terms, or certainly we're going to deal with what he says briefly, he describes his kingdom.

[ 35 : 51 ] This king from Bethlehem. We've thought of his origins. We've thought also of his time of appearing, of his identity, of his mission.

But finally, what can we say of his kingdom? Well, in verse 4, in the second half of the verse, that is described for us. We read there, and they will live securely.

For then his greatness will reach to the ends of the earth. His greatness will reach to the ends of the earth. We've just recognized that his mission will involve establishing his kingdom.

But what can we say of the extent of his kingdom? Will it rival the power and might of Assyria? Will it rival the power and might of Babylon?

Will it rival the power and might of Persia or of Rome? Or indeed, any others that might follow? No, it would not rival.

[ 36 : 53 ] Not rival. It would eclipse. Eclipse. Eclipse. Eclipse. Eclipse. The power and the might of all these nations and of all these powers that had gone before.

For his greatness will reach the ends of the earth. And we as Christians, as those who are subjects of the king from Bethlehem, we must live and work in the confidence that this truth ought to instill in us.

His greatness will reach the ends of the earth. We are on the winning side. And that is not empty triumphalism.

It's the truth. We are on the winning side. For this kingdom, the kingdom of the king from Bethlehem, we are assured it will reach the ends of the earth.

The author, Philip Pullman, famous for his trilogy of the dark materials, was once interviewed, not that long ago, some time ago, on Radio 4.

[ 37 : 59 ] And among the things that he said, he said the following, and I quote, without a doubt, Christianity will cease to exist in a few years.

It's difficult to imagine anything quite so foolish that could be said, but that's what he said. He might have done better to heed the words of the historian, T.R. Glover, who declared, and I quote, the final disappearance of Christianity has been prophesied so often as to be no longer interesting.

It's not even interesting when people say, oh, the church, it's coming to an end. Christianity, it's on its last legs. It's been prophesied so often.

And those who have prophesied it, they're in the grave. And the church of Jesus Christ continues. The kingdom of the king from Bethlehem extends its reach to the very ends of the earth.



Mr. Pullman thinks that Christianity is soon to disappear. Well, all I can say to Mr. Pullman is dream on, dream on, because the greatness and kingdom of the king from Bethlehem reaches the ends of the earth and will endure and will prosper forever and ever and ever.

[ 39 : 19 ] And so, what I would encourage you to do this Christmas, when you hear and sing of the little town of Bethlehem, when you do so, fix your thoughts thoughts and direct your worship on the king from Bethlehem, the king prophesied by the prophet Micah, Jesus, the shepherd king whose kingdom reaches to the very ends of the earth.

Let us pray. Thank you.