

Micah 5:2
“Oh Little Town of Bethlehem”

1. THE ETERNITY PRIOR TO THE BIRTH OF JESUS
 - A. The place He lived
 - B. The place He left
2. THE HUMILITY PORTRAYED IN THE BIRTH OF JESUS
 - A. It was a little place
 - B. It was a likely place
3. THE AUTHORITY PROMISED WITH THE BIRTH OF JESUS
 - A. We acknowledge the fact of this
 - B. We await the fulfillment of this

1. Pulitzer-prize winning historian, David McCullough, has released a new book just in time for the Christmas Season. The book is entitled, “In the Dark Streets Shineth: A 1941 Christmas Eve Story”.ⁱ

2. The book centers on the two addresses to the nation, given by President Roosevelt and Prime Minister Winston Churchill, on Christmas Eve, 1941.

3. In the book McCullough tells of how Roosevelt and Churchill went to a Christmas worship service, and there Churchill heard for the first time the song, “Oh Little Town of Bethlehem.”

4. The hymn had been written 75 years earlier, by a pastor from Philadelphia. Churchill loved it, and according to McCullough, they both “sang lustily, if not exactly in tune.”ⁱⁱⁱ

5. Long before anyone was moved to write a hymn about the tiny Jewish village of Bethlehem, the Prophet Micah was inspired by the Holy Ghost to foretell the reason why Bethlehem would be sung about in the years to come.

6. Looking through the fog of the future, Micah said, *“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.”*

7. Though Micah may not have fully realized it, he had prophesied the birth of Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, and the Savior of the world.

8. I want us to examine Micah’s message about the little town of Bethlehem, and more importantly about the sovereign Son who would be born there.

9. Looking at this verse, Micah points us to:

I. THE ETERNITY PRIOR TO THE BIRTH OF JESUS

1. Though it comes at the end, the last phrase of verse two actually points us back to a period before the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem.
2. Speaking of the Christ who was to come, Micah said, "...*whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting.*"
3. The late Dr. Adrian Rogers said that this phrase reminds us that Jesus Christ had a birth, but not a beginning. He has been from of old, and from everlasting.
4. Consider this eternity prior to His birth. Consider first of all:

A. The place He lived

1. Notice that phrase, "*goings forth*". It is translated from a single word, and the idea behind this word is a place of origin. It is where you come from.
2. For me, that is Boone, NC. I was born on April, 4, 1978, in Boone, NC. I have "gone forth" from there.
4. Look at what Micah says about Jesus. He says, "...*whose goings forth have been from of old...*" Take note of that word "old".
5. It is same word we find used to describe God in Deuteronomy 33:27, where it says, "*The **eternal** God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms* (emphasis mine)..."
6. In other words, Jesus came from eternity. Before his birth in the town of Bethlehem, his hometown had been eternity past, where only God Himself had existed.
7. We are reminded of what John said. "*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*" (John 1:1)
8. Jesus said in John 8:58, "*Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am.*" Jesus existed before His earthly birth, and before anyone else's birth for that matter.
9. The reality is that Jesus Christ lived *before* this planet, before He lived *on* this planet. He came from eternity, which is the place He lived, but notice also further, this points us to:

B. The place he left

1. The whole point of Micah's prophecy in verse 2 is that eternal Savior did not remain hidden in eternity, but he stepped out of eternity and into human history.

2. Again, Micah said that His, “...*goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting.*” He had existed in eternity, in the everlasting past, but at Bethlehem, He left all that behind and came down to a cold, cruel world.
3. Theologians refer to this as the condescension of Christ. That simply means that Jesus took a step *down* in order to take on the body of that baby.
4. He left the holy cries of seraphim and cherubim for the bleating of sheep and lowing of cattle. He left His seat on the lofty throne of heaven to be laid in a straw-filled manger.
5. He took off the robes of His eternal, glowing glory in order to be wrapped in swaddling clothes by the hands of a Jewish peasant girl.
6. He whose hands had formed the far reaches of a universe we’ve only begun to discover confined Himself to the small span of woman’s womb.
7. He who had formed the first woman from Adam’s rib lived nine months inside of a woman for the sake of Adam’s race. He left the infinity of eternity behind when He came to live among His creatures.
8. Before we look with Micah to Bethlehem, let us not forget that Jesus left eternity prior to entering history, and though He was born, that was not His beginning.
9. Looking at verse two, we are pointed not only to *the eternity prior to the birth of Jesus*, but notice also secondly we see:

II. THE HUMILITY PORTRAYED AT THE BIRTH OF JESUS

1. Look again at Micah’s words in verse two. He prophesied, “*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.*”
2. This is by no means the first mention of the city of Bethlehem. Jacob’s beloved wife Rachel had died there, while giving birth to Benjamin.
3. Of course, Naomi and Ruth returned to Bethlehem, and there discovered the grace of God in the fields of Boaz. It was also known as the city of David, because of the great king’s family ties to it.
4. None of these, however, would be the little town’s ultimate claim to fame. It was the prophecy of Micah, and its fulfillment that put Bethlehem “on the map”, so to speak.

5. In reality, Bethlehem is a humble sort-of place for the Son of God to be born. Think of this with me. First of all, as Micah says:

A. It was a little place

1. If you knew nothing of the Bible, and I told you that one day God's only Son was born into this world, you would surely imagine that His birth took place in one of the great cities of the world.

2. Surely, He would be born in a mighty capitol somewhere, in the palace of King, or in the ornate confines of a golden Temple.

3. Yet, as Micah says, it was a in a little place. He said of Bethlehem, "...*though thou be little among the thousands of Judah...*"

4. Spurgeon said of Christ's birth, "No Bashan's high hill, not on Hebron's royal mount, not in Jerusalem's palaces, but the humble...village of Bethlehem."ⁱⁱⁱ

5. The little town of Bethlehem reminds us that Jesus did not come to save merely the royalty and cream of society. No, He came to the downcast and outcast; to the little people in little places overlooked by the world.

6. In Matthew 11:29, Jesus said, "...*learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart...*" That humble spirit was first displayed when the Son of God entered the world in a little place like Bethlehem.

7. In choosing a place like Bethlehem we are mindful of how our God always works. He chooses unlikely and unworthy things in order to display His own glory. Matthew Henry said, "Christ would give honor to the place of His birth, and not derive honor from it."

8. What was true of Bethlehem is true of the human hearts where Christ chooses to dwell today. He comes not to the proud, noble, and haughty of the world, but to those who are sinners, humble and broken before Him.

9. The humility of Christ is shown in the fact that Bethlehem was a little place. However, with that being said, we see also with regard to the little town of Bethlehem, that:

B. It was a likely place

1. While some who do not understand the truth about Jesus might be surprised that the Son of God and King of kings would be born in a little place, those of us who know Him realize that Bethlehem was actually a fitting place for His birth.

2. When you understand the significance of Bethlehem, you recognize why it was a likely and appropriate place for the birth of Jesus.
3. The name “Bethlehem” literally means “house of bread”. It is fitting, therefore, that He who is the Bread of Life should be born in that place.
4. Look at the name “Ephratah”. That is the older name for Bethlehem, which was retained and often attached to it.
5. The name “Ephratah” means “fruitfulness”. Think of that! Is it not then a likely place for Jesus to be born; He who is the Vine, and apart from whom we can bear no fruit?
6. I quote Mr. Spurgeon again. He said, “Our poor barren hearts ne'er produced one fruit, or flower, till they were watered with the Savior's blood. It is his incarnation which fattens the soil of our hearts. There had been pricking thorns on all the ground, and mortal poisons, before He came; but our fruitfulness comes from Him.”^{iv}
7. His birth on earth was so humble, that only a handful of shepherds came to greet Him. Yet, it was so fitting, so right, that the angels of heaven sang, “Glory to God in the highest!”
8. Bethlehem was just a little place, and yet what could be a more likely place for Him who would take on the form of a servant, humble Himself, and become obedient unto death, even the death of the cross? (Philippians 2:7-8)
9. In Micah's prophecy we are pointed to *the eternity prior to the birth of Jesus*, and *the humility portrayed at the birth of Jesus*, but notice also thirdly, we see here:

III. THE AUTHORITY PROMISED WITH THE BIRTH OF JESUS

1. Look again at Micah's words in verse two. He said, “*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...*”
2. At the beginning of his book, Micah tells us the kings under which he prophesied, and therefore we are able to date his prophecy to somewhere around 700 B.C.
3. When we realize that Jesus was born some seven centuries later, we are once again pointed to the truth of the Word of God.

4. With that being said, Micah's prophecy points us not only to the birth of Jesus, but to some things about His life and purpose as well. Consider the fullness of what Micah said about our Lord.

5. First of all, looking at this verse from the perspective of today:

A. We acknowledge the fact of this

1. Some 700 years before it happened, the Holy Spirit spoke to Micah, and He prophesied what the angel later verified in Luke 2:11, "...unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord."

2. Apart from a handful of heretics who try to deny the existence of Jesus altogether, most people acknowledge that some 2,000 years ago Jesus was born in Bethlehem.

3. We read Micah's words today, and we are reminded that what God promises, He will do. What He plans to accomplish, He will bring to pass.

4. Understanding that truth, if God kept His word in the first advent of Jesus, then we can be certain that He will keep His word with regards to the second advent of Jesus.

5. If what He said through Micah about the first coming of Christ was true, then we can trust what He said through John, and Paul, and Peter about the second coming of Christ as well.

6. This prophecy of Micah reminds us of the infallibility and certainty of God's Word! He did not fail to send His Son to redeem us, and He will not fail to send that same Son to receive us!

7. Professor Robert D. Wilson of Princeton University, held numerous doctorates, and spoke 45 languages and dialects of the Middle East.

8. He once said of the Scriptures, "I have come to the conviction that no man knows enough to attack the veracity of the Old Testament. Every time when anyone has been able to get together enough documentary 'proofs' to undertake an investigation, the biblical facts in the original text have victoriously met the test."^v

9. That is great to hear, but we don't need PhD's from Princeton to see that the Word of God is true. We can acknowledge the fact of what Micah said about the birth of Jesus!

10. In that same line, as we look at this prophecy, we not only acknowledge the fact of this, but also:

B. We await the fulfillment of this

1. There is a part of this prophecy that has most surely come to pass. Micah said, *“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...”*
2. Jesus has come forth from Bethlehem unto God. His ministry was commenced in Galilee and completed at Calvary.
3. Yet, look again at what Micah said. He said the One who was to come out of Bethlehem was to be “ruler in Israel”.
4. Micah not only predicted the birth of Jesus, but also the yet-future reign of Jesus! Through His prophet, God promised not only that His Son would be born, but that He would also reign!
5. There was a distinct authority promised with the birth of Jesus. Because of that, we are mindful that He came the first time as a baby, but He is coming back as a King!
6. Just as godly Simeon looked forward to birth of Israel’s Savior, we as God’s people today look forward to the coming of Israel’s King!
7. We know that what Micah predicted will surely come to pass! Jesus Christ is coming again, and He is going to set up His Kingdom on this earth, and reign in righteousness over all the nations.
8. Another prophet saw even more clearly the day of which Micah spoke. John said in Revelation 19, *“And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war. His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on his head were many crowns; and he had a name written, that no man knew, but he himself. And he was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and his name is called The Word of God.”* (Revelation 19:11-13)
9. As we celebrate the birth Micah predicted so long ago, we also anticipate the kingdom over which Jesus will rule in the days to come.
10. Just once more I call upon the words of the Prince of Preachers. Over a century ago, He said of this text, “In a short time, he who at his birth was hailed king of the Jews by Easterns, and at his death was written king of the Jews by a Western, shall be called king of the Jews everywhere—yes, king of the Jews and Gentiles also...”^{vi}

11. This season as we look back to Bethlehem, let us also look forward and say, “Even so, come Lord Jesus!”

1. Today, the little town of Bethlehem is not nearly so small. It is a tourist destination, and boasts of population of some 30,000 people.
2. Of course, it was not so when Micah uttered this prophecy, nor when Jesus was born there in fulfillment of it.
3. Looking at the Word of God, we are pointed not so much to a little town, as to the Mighty King who was born there.
4. If you don’t know Him, knowing where He is from is of little help to you. If you have not yielded to Him, trusting Him as Savior and Lord of your life, then the historical truth of His birthplace is of no real help for your soul.
5. Micah spoke of Bethlehem, but God wants us to see Jesus!

ⁱ McCullough, David, *In The Dark Streets Shineth: A 1941 Christmas Eve Story*, *Shadow Mountain*, 2010

ⁱⁱ Tooley, Mark, “Christmas with Churchill and FDR”, 12/1/10, *spectator.org*, accessed 12/2/10, <http://spectator.org/archives/2010/12/01/christmas-with-churchill-and-f>

ⁱⁱⁱ Spurgeon, Charles, “The Incarnation and Birth of Christ”, *spurgeon.org*, accessed 12/2/10, <http://www.spurgeon.org/sermons/0057.htm>

^{iv} Ibid

^v “Bible, inerrancy of”, *sermonillustrations.com*, accessed 12/2/10, http://www.sermonillustrations.com/a-z/b/bible_inerrancy_of.htm

^{vi} Spurgeon, Charles, Ibid