12-22-24

Micah 5:1-5a

Micah prophesied to both the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah. His ministry lasted over fifty years and his prophesying overlapped Hosea and Isaiah. During Micah’s time, the Assyrians defeated and displaced the northern kingdom and were quite a problem to Judah. They decimated many towns and cities in Judah, and had Jerusalem under siege. This is when king Hezekiah plead to the LORD, and Yahweh intervened by sending the angel of the LORD who put to death 185,000 Assyrian soldiers in one night. But we must also keep in mind that the Assyrian army was the rod of judgement that God used to discipline the sinful and idolatrous people of both kingdoms.

The book of Micah covers a lot of territory. He warns all of Israel and Judah of the harsh punishment that God will bring upon them if they don’t turn back to Him whole heartedly. And those warnings alternate with promises of how God will restore His people after they are dispersed and how He Himself will shepherd them. Micah prophesies both comings of Christ; both the advents of Jesus. And, as usual for the prophets, all these things tend to be mixed together; even in the same verse.

Chapter 5 begins by speaking of judgement. Jerusalem is advised to gather it’s troops. This is most likely because the Assyrian siege is coming. It is a call to arms to defend itself, although we know that had Jerusalem tried to defend itself, it would have lost. Had it not been for the humble actions of king Hezekiah and the intervention of the LORD, Jerusalem would have been defeated.

The next part of the first line says something like “*city of troops*” or “*daughter of troops*”. The literal Hebrew is “*daughter of troops*”; and that is a way to describe a character trait. It is saying that Jerusalem is a warlike city. Micah had used military terms before to describe how hostile Jerusalem is to the poor and the stranger. This is part of the reason for the judgement that Micah warns them is coming. The rich and the government officials and even the religious leadership and the prophets have all become corrupt and will set aside justice for personal gain. Micah is letting them know that they will face judgement for their corruption and callousness; for their disregard for justice. They will face siege conditions that lead to horrible acts in order to survive.

These are all things that had been building before king Hezekiah had made reforms; but the undercurrent was still there. And his son, Manasseh, made the future destruction of the southern kingdom inevitable.

Micah lets them know that they will suffer the very worst of indignities: the king will be struck on the cheek. This is the proverbial “slap in the face”; and it would show that the king and country had absolutely no power or recourse; they would be entirely subjugated.

Perhaps it would be good now for a moment to remember that Jesus, the coming King that Micah later talks about, endured being struck on the cheek. The Roman guards slapped Him while mocking Him as King. He suffered that humiliation so that we would not have to suffer the humiliation of our own sin. Our precious Jesus offers us God’s mercy by fulfilling God’s justice on our behalf. Our only other option is to experience the everlasting siege of God’s justice ourselves.

Micah had pronounced the coming judgement of God that will surely come on these greedy and unjust people who worship money and power over the one true God. But as he does so often, Micah now turns to the promise of redemption for the remnant.

These next verses are somewhat familiar to us because they are quoted in Matthew 2:6. The wise men from the east had come seeking the new born King of the Jews because they had seen His star rising. Herod the great was very much disturbed by this because he was paranoid and would retain his kingship at all costs. Herod called together the chief priests and scribes, asking them where the Messiah was to be born. They answered him by quoting from Micah. They knew exactly where the Christ, the greater son of David, was to be born.

It was a sad testimony and a prophecy in itself, that the Jewish religious establishment wouldn’t even travel a few miles to Bethlehem to see the Messiah, yet some gentiles would travel for weeks to come worship Him and bring gifts. Israel, as a whole, rejected their Messiah and brought further judgement on themselves; in so doing, the doors were open wide to the gentiles for salvation. This fulfilled the promise to Abraham that through his seed, all the nations of the world would be blessed. We are now spiritual descendants of Abraham. Still, as we see in Micah, God is faithful to His people and Israel will still be brought under the loving care of their true shepherd, Jesus.

There were many sizable towns and cities in Judah, and Bethlehem was not one of them. The ancient name of the area surrounding Bethlehem was called Ephrathah. This town was designated Bethlehem Ephrathah to distinguish it from other towns named Bethlehem. Bethlehem means “house of bread”, so it was not an uncommon name. Of course, how appropriate it is that Jesus, the “Bread of Life” should be born in “the house of bread”.

About 300 years earlier, as we read in 1 Samuel 17:12, “*Now David was the son of the Ephrathite of Bethlehem in Judah, whose name was Jesse*” So here we have another example of God’s word telling us that the Messiah would come from the house of David. As is so often the case, God does not use somewhere powerful or fancy for the birth of the Saviour. God tends to use the weak and powerless. Paul points this out in 1 Corinthians 1:27, “*but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong*.” This is a good reminder to all of us; God can use each of us as we are, when we surrender ourselves to Him.

Suddenly, in the third line of verse 2, God is speaking directly in the first person: *From you One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel.* Now there were lots of kings that came directly from the line of David, but God is saying that the One He is referring to will come from Bethlehem also. And there is a special close tie between this ruler and God; He says One will go forth “*for Me*” or “*to Me*”. Hindsight gives us the ability to know that God is talking about Jesus. He was born in Bethlehem of the line of David, and we know there is a very special connection between Him and God.

Here He is speaking of the first advent; Christ, the God-man was born in Bethlehem, a son of David. But He immediately goes to the second advent by saying that Christ will be a ruler in Israel. Jesus did not come as King the first time; He came as a servant. But He will come back a second time and establish Himself as King where He will rule from Israel.

In this prophecy Micah gives a hint about who this King will be. *His goings forth are from long ago*. In other words, the things this One is doing and has done; the business He has been about. It has been going on since long ago. And He’s not even here yet. In fact, long ago encompasses eternity past. The only way for this to work out is if the King is God Himself. This fits in with other prophets.

Isaiah 9:6 is a well-known verse:

*For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us;
And the government will rest on His shoulders;
And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.*

So, Jesus was born as a child and He will be King as God has said because “*the government will rest on His shoulders.*” And when you look at that list of names for Jesus, don’t glance over the one that says “*Mighty God*”. Back in Micah 4:7, he says “*And the Lord will reign over them in Mount Zion*.” “The LORD” is the covenant name of God: Yahweh. He will rule as King.

Originally, Israel was to be a theocracy; they were to be ruled directly by God. However, they complained that they wanted a king like all the rest of the nations, so God granted their request (even though it was actually a rejection of God) and gave them a king. What will happen when Jesus returns is that He will be King. Jesus is a man and He will rule as King. At the same time, He is God. Israel, and the world, will once again be a theocracy.

Verse 3 begins with “therefore”; so the result of what has been said is that Israel will be given up for a time. There will be a period of time where Israel will be left on its own as part of the judgement that comes upon them. Again, we should note the abandonment that took place when Jesus cried from the cross “*My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me*.” Jesus accepted the abandonment that we are due, so that we can be in the presence of God.

But Micah continues with the note of hope and promise. Israel will only be given up until “*she who is in labor had borne a child.*” While we can think of “she who is in labor” as being Mary, it is also referring to Bethlehem, since she is the one from whom the child is coming that will be ruler in Israel. This is certainly the first advent, yet the next two lines point to the second.

These lines speak of the return of Israel. The northern kingdom was scattered by the Assyrians and the southern kingdom was taken by the Babylonians. While some were able to return, many remained scattered throughout the known world. Once Rome destroyed Judah around 70 AD, the Jews were again scattered. But there will come a time when Jesus will regather Israel as the faithful remnant. Even now, Israel is open to Jews throughout the world to return to their homeland. And since Jesus is also a Jew, they are all His brothers and sisters.

Of course, in the very real spiritual sense, once we accept Christ as our Saviour we are adopted by God as His children and become brothers and sisters of Jesus. We become part of that remnant; spiritual children of Abraham.

And here is more good news about this King who will reign over the whole world: He will reign as a Shepherd. Israel had plenty of kings. Some of them tried to reign with justice but being human, they didn’t always manage to do so. Many kings were flat out evil. But the King Micah promises is like a shepherd who will lead His people with kindness and will care for the people. He will rule absolutely justly and with great mercy. What a blessing it will be to serve and live under such a King.

This King will rule in the strength of Yahweh and He will rule in the majesty of the name of Yahweh. These descriptors tell us that it will be just as if Yahweh Himself were sitting on the throne. Jesus is the only One who can do this. And it will be Yahweh on the throne. How blessed that will be, especially after the dark rule of the antichrist.

Our final section is the first part of verse 5, which fits in with this day in the advent celebration along with Christ. *This One will be our peace.* Peace, like love, will remain with us forever under Christ. In the Isaiah passage we looked at, Jesus was called “*Prince of Peace*”. In John 14:27 Jesus said: *Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful.*

What precious words from our present and future King. But let’s be sure we understand them. First off, it is not peace of the world. In this world there will be wars and rumors of wars; we will have persecution and tribulation; there will be strife in society, in family, and in church. There will be much for us to be fearful of and troubled about. So what peace does Jesus offer?

First and foremost it is peace with God. This is what the angels sang of to the shepherds when they said, “Peace on earth to men with whom God is pleased.” In Romans 5:10, the apostle Paul lets us know that we were enemies of God and in Ephesians 2:3 he tells us we are by nature children of wrath. There is no peace with God under those conditions. But when we accept Jesus as our Saviour, our sins are forgiven, our guilt is removed, and we are covered in the righteousness of Christ. God’s justice is satisfied so that we are no longer His enemies but we are His children. Jesus has earned us peace with God and we have that now.

Secondly, we can have a peace in our souls even now; regardless of what is going on in our lives. That peace comes from knowing that God has all things under His control and He will bring about what is best for His children. We still have trials, troubles, and temptations; but we have that solid rock of Christ to cling to. With Christ, we have all the good promises of God to look forward to.

Finally, at the second advent of Jesus; and with the coming of the new heavens and new earth, there will be peace. All war, all tribulation, all evil, all sin will be gone. All the difficulties we faced in this life will not be worth remembering. And Jesus, the Good Shepherd, will still be King. Yahweh will be on the throne.

Prayer

Lord, thank You for Your prophets. Their words were true regarding the coming judgement for Your wayward people; their words were true about the coming of Jesus to be the Saviour of the world; and now we can believe the promise that He will come back to be King of all and we will be His prized people.

Lord, while the words of judgement are still ringing in our ears, help us to take them to heart. You are truly love but You are truly just. Help us Lord so that we don’t take Your great mercy for granted.

Thank you Jesus for the peace You have gotten for us; we owe all of our salvation to You. We will humbly bow before You as our King.

In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.