

THOU, BETHLEHEM
Micah 5:2

Scripture reading: Matt. 2:1-11.

Intro: Over $\frac{1}{4}$ of all of the books of the Bible are prophetic in character. As to actual content, at least $\frac{1}{5}$ of the Bible was prophetic when it was written. Cf. Chafer, IV, p. 256.

At least $\frac{1}{2}$ of all prophecy has something to do with the Lord Jesus Christ. Cf. Pierson, Knowing The Scriptures, p. 43.

Concerning all of these prophecies, we see that the prophecies of Christ gradually unfold throughout the Scriptures:

- 1) First, it is stated that the Redeemer would be a man, the seed of the woman (Gen. 3:5).
- 2) Next we are told from what division of the human family He would come--from Shem (Gen. 9:26, 27).
- 3) Then we find that he will come as a descendant of Abraham, i.e., from the nation Israel (Gen. 12:3).
- 4) After that, the particular tribe is mentioned: Judah (Gen. 49:10).
- 5) In Psalm 89:19, 20 the family of David is indicated to narrow it down even more.
- 6) Isaiah makes it very clear that He will be God as well as man (Isa. 7:14; 9:6,7).
- 7) Micah tells us where it is that He will be born--in our text this morning.
- 8) As we get into the NT, Matthew and Luke tell us who His mother would be, even before He was born.

Therefore, we can say that the prophecies concerning Christ give us the greatest proof that the Bible is the book that it claims to be: the very Word of God!

As we go to our text this morning, some might say, How do you know that this is speaking of Christ?

Our answer is threefold:

- 1) Because Matthew says that it does. Cf. Matt. 2:4-6.
- 2) Because it fits in perfectly with all of the other prophecies of Christ.
- 3) Because no one but Christ, both God and man, could possibly fulfill such a prediction.

Let us look in detail at Micah 5:2. Only God would be able to compress so much truth into so few words.

As we begin, we immediately come to words which suggest . .

I. AN EMPHASIS: "But thou, Bethlehem Ephrathah!"

In the Scriptures we have many expressions which are used to indicate something very important, such as, "Thus saith the Lord," or, "Behold," or, "Verily, verily," and many others.

Such is the word, "Thou." It is very emphatic. Its conciseness makes it even more so. It indicates that what the prophet is about to say could not possibly be fulfilled in any other place except in Bethlehem. Bethlehem is thus distinguished from every other place in all the world.

And so the emphasis ~~points to~~ ^{points to} God's choice.

II. AN ANCIENT SUGGESTION: "Bethlehem Ephrathah."

As far back as Gen. 35:16-20 we find these two names. It is the place where Rachel died and was buried. Evidently it was called Ephrath, or Ephrathah, first, and later called, Bethlehem.

We have a suggestion that comes out of ancient history that the Lord had an unusual plan for this particular place. We can see evidence of God's providence. The very names are prophetic:

- 1) Ephrathah means fertile or fruitful fields, which described the land.
- 2) Bethlehem means house of bread, bread being the basic food of the people.

Therefore, we should not be surprised to see that from this place God was going to do a work that would provide, not the physical food which men need, but the spiritual food.

III. A PARADOX--OF GOD'S GRACE: "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."

This is unbelievable even if we did not go on to finish the verse. Out of Bethlehem?????

Bethlehem was "little," meaning:

- 1) Small in number.
- 2) Insignificant, despised (for its size), nationally worthless.

The word thousands is a military term. Every city which wanted to distinguish itself was to select 1,000 men to serve as a unit in the army of Israel. Bethle-

hem could not do that, and so was looked down on as being of help in the defense of Israel against her enemies.

But look: Out of this insignificant place the "ruler" would come! Could this possibly be true?

Bethlehem's insignificance was emphasized by its closeness to Jerusalem--5 or 6 miles away.

Could it be possible that the greatest Defender of all Israel for all time would come from Bethlehem?

This is exactly what the prophet Micah is saying!

And is this not consistent with the way the Lord has always worked? Think of:

- 1) Abraham (Isa. 51:2; Ezek. 33:24).
- 2) Moses.
- 3) David.
- 4) Isaiah.
- 5) Jeremiah.
- 6) The Apostles.
- 7) Paul. Cf. 1 Tim. 1:15.
- 8) Other details of our Lord's birth.
- 9) Cf. 1 Cor. 1:26-29. Also see Isa. 55:8,9.

But as we look at these words and then go on to read the rest of the verse, we realize that Micah is talking about:

IV. A MIRACLE.

Read the words very carefully beginning with, "yet out of thee," and going to the end of the verse.

"Out of thee" means:

- 1) The place, or origin, of a thing.
- 2) The material out of which anything is made.

Therefore, the "ruler" would be one of them, from Bethlehem, a real man, a human being.

Scripture bears this out concerning Christ: Rom. 8:3; 1 Tim. 2:5; Phil. 2:7, 8; Heb. 2:9, 14, 16, 17.

But the last part of the verse indicates that He was also GOD!

Fausset says (JFB, IV, 600), "The terms convey the strongest assertion of infinite duration of which the Hebrew language is capable."

Always before when our Lord had stepped into time it had been from eternity; now it will be from Jerusalem. What a verse on pre-incarnate appearances of Christ!

Never before had there been such a person--God and man --and there will never be another!

Is it any wonder that we are reminded throughout the OT that God is a God of omnipotence? What evidence of God's power we have here!

But there are two expressions that we must note before we leave this verse for this time. They are words which bring into focus a principle and a purpose.

V. A PRINCIPLE.

Notice the change from "Judah" in the first part of the verse, to "Israel" in the latter part of the verse.

Where was Israel when Micah lived and wrote? In captivity. "Judah" was the southern kingdom, still independent--but not for long because things were going bad in Judah.

But here is a promise that the "ruler" who was coming would rule, not just over Judah, but over the whole nation!

That in itself is amazing!

But what is the principle? It is this: The ruler, whom we learn elsewhere, will reign over all nations, will start with His own people, and then reach out to other people.

Israel is the key to world peace.

But let us bring the application even closer home.

All of us are concerned this Christmas time about others who do not know the Lord. Let us always remember that the key to God's work in others is His work in us. The world is in a terrible condition today, but that fact is intensified because the Lord's people are the way they are.

Finally . . .

VVI. A PURPOSE.

Of all the words found in this verse, none is more

important than the words, "unto me."

The Lord Jesus Christ came from Bethlehem, but He also came, says the Father, "unto me." This is the most important.

What does it mean?

It means that our Lord came primarily to do God's will, to serve Him, to satisfy Him. The Lord Jesus Christ came primarily FOR GOD!

Cf. Heb. 10:7, 9a; John 6:38; 2 Cor. 5:17-21. IF GOD HAD NOT BEEN SATISFIED WITH THE WORK OF HIS SON, NO MAN WOULD EVER HAVE BEEN SAVED, AND ISRAEL WOULD HAVE BEEN LEFT WITHOUT HOPE!

But, unfortunately, when we preach the Gospel, we spend most of our time talking about what it means to man. MICAH IS SPEAKING ABOUT WHAT IT MEANS TO GOD!

Concl: It really is an amazing verse, is it not?

And against the dark background of Micah's prophecy and Israel's history, it appears even more wonderful.

Israel's hope is in Christ--the Christ who has satisfied God by His death and resurrection.

But, thank God, it goes beyond Israel. It is for the Gentiles, too. Cf. Rom. 1:16; John 3:16.

There is bread in this verse for the one who has trusted Christ, and for the one who has not.

No one should be more thankful at Christmas than true believers in Christ should be.

And we can be thankful, too, the offer for salvation is for all men, and that those here this morning without Christ can receive Him right now, and be saved.