

Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

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Birthplace of the King

by Dan Trygg

“But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel. His goings forth are from long ago, from the days of eternity. ³ Therefore He will give them up until the time when she who is in labor has borne a child. Then the remainder of His brethren will return to the sons of Israel. ⁴ And He will arise and shepherd His flock in the strength of Yahweh, in the majesty of the name of Yahweh His God. And they will remain, because at that time He will be great to the ends of the earth. ⁵ This One will be our peace. When the Assyrian invades our land, when he tramples on our citadels, then we will raise against him seven shepherds and eight leaders of men. ⁶ They will shepherd the land of Assyria with the sword, the land of Nimrod at its entrances; and He will deliver us from the Assyrian when he attacks our land and when he tramples our territory.”
Micah 5:2-6

We have been surveying some of the passages in the OT that prophesy about the coming Kingdom of God. The connecting theme was the Kingdom, and each of those passages contained a clear reference to that reality, even using that word “kingdom” in each example. We learned that **Yahweh will rule over the nations** (Psa. 22:28). His Kingdom will be glorious and majestic, and will last forever (Psa. 145:12,13; Dan 4:2,3,34). **God’s Kingdom will never be destroyed** (Dan. 6:26). **There will be a child born who will receive the kingdom of David, which will continue to expand and fill the earth, and will never end.** He will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Father of Eternity (Isa. 9:6,7). In another place, it says that **there will arise a king anointed by God, who will also be called “God”**. He will *also* reign over a kingdom that will last forever (Psalm 45:6,7). **In the days of the fourth kingdom from the Babylonian kings (during the time of the Romans), a stone will be cut out without hands (without human effort) and will crush and dispel all other human kingdoms**, will fill the earth, and this kingdom will last forever (Dan. 2:44,45). Note the parallel statements and common themes. If this were not enough, we are told that, **in the last days, there will be a more-than-human-human, ...“One like a Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven”..., who will come before the Ancient of Days in the last days, and will receive the Kingdom from Him.** His dominion will be an everlasting dominion, which will never end (Dan. 7:13-18). **Finally, we are told that “the sovereignty, the dominion and the greatness of all the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be given to the people of the saints of the Highest One;** His Kingdom will be an everlasting Kingdom, and all the dominions will serve and obey Him” (Dan 7:25-27). This reaches back to much earlier in the Biblical narrative, to where God originally established His Kingdom with Israel (Ex. 19:1-6). He offered a covenant to them. If they would keep His precepts and obey His voice, they would be His special people, ...a holy, set-apart nation..., and they would become a kingdom of priests for God. The emphasis there was their obedience to God and the priestly mediator role they would play toward other nations. In Daniel 7, the emphasis is on the Kingdom, ...how they will rule together with God in His forever-Kingdom.

There is another key prophetic passage for our consideration: Micah 5. The prophet Micah lived in the eighth century B.C. He was a contemporary of Isaiah. While Isaiah was strategically placed in Jerusalem, in close relationship with the kings and leaders of Judah, Micah was from a rural area to the southwest of Jerusalem. He prophesied during the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah of Judah. **His messages were addresses against both the northern kingdom of Israel, as well as the southern kingdom of Judah.** He prophesied the destruction of Samaria, the capital of the northern kingdom, and the exile of the populace by the Assyrians, because of their idolatry, corrupt civic and religious leaders, and their oppression of the poor (1:7; 3:1-7). He also was the first to prophesy of the destruction of Jerusalem, and the exile of the people of Judah to Babylon, because of their corrupt religious leadership and their mistreatment of the poor (3:9-12; 6:6-8). **Interspersed among these messages of judgment are also prophecies about return, restoration, the defeat of their enemies, the reestablishment of a king, and God ruling over them as their head at Jerusalem.** Furthermore, the word of Yahweh will go out from Jerusalem to all nations, and there will be peace forever after. **These prophecies are amazing, when you consider that Israel’s defeat and exile by the Assyrians happened about 20 years after Micah began his ministry, ...and the defeat and exile of Judah happened more than 150 years after Micah’s time!** And, again, not only did he prophesy their removal from the land, but also their return to it! **That did not happen until after more than 200 years!**

One of the key messages of Micah is how **God hates false religion and hypocrisy.** He is looking for true humility toward God, and fairness and compassion toward the powerless. One of the most quoted passages from Micah is 6:6-8: “With what shall I come to Yahweh, and bow myself before the God on high? Shall I come to Him with burnt offerings, with yearling calves? ⁷ Does Yahweh take delight in thousands of rams, in ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I present my firstborn for my rebellious acts, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? ⁸ He has told you,

O man, what is good; and what does Yahweh require of you, but to do justice, to love faithfulness, and to walk humbly with your God?" **It is not about outward religious performance. God is looking for an inward respect for Him, and fair and compassionate treatment of others.**

Micah goes back and forth, between the present circumstances, and prophetic messages, throughout his book. In history, the Assyrians took the kingdom of the ten tribes of Israel into exile, to be relocated and scattered elsewhere. It was a way to demoralize captives and disperse any nationalistic tendencies they might have. The Assyrians were later defeated by the Babylonians in 605 B.C. The Babylonians then took captives from Jerusalem into exile on three occasions (in 605, 597 and 586 B.C.), finally destroying Jerusalem in 586 B.C. and removed the survivors of Judah to ghettos in Babylon. After about 70 years from the first captivity to Babylon, the first Jews began to return to Judea. This is important information in order to understand, because **some of Micah's prophecies describe a future time when "many nations will be gathered against" Israel, ...and, God will gather these nations like sheaves to the threshing floor. Yahweh will tell the remnant of Israel to "arise and thresh". The nation of Israel will soundly defeat their enemies and basically, 'clean their clocks'. This has happened in part several times in modern history, but there seems to be a much fuller completion to this prophecy. Several other Biblical prophets describe a time at the end of the age, when the nations surrounding Israel will indeed come against them. At that point, God Himself, will intervene to decimate their enemies.**

At this point, Micah breaks away from his message to describe the coming of a future King. "But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel. His goings forth are from long ago, from the days of eternity. Therefore, He will abandon them until the time when she who is in labor has given birth; then the rest of His brothers will return to the people of Israel. And He will arise and shepherd His flock in the strength of Yahweh, in the majesty of the name of Yahweh His God. And they will remain, because at that time He will be great to the ends of the earth. And this One will be our peace. When Assyria invades our land, when it marches against our fortresses, we will raise against it seven shepherds, even eight leaders of men. And they will shepherd the land of Assyria with the sword, the land of Nimrod at its entrances; and He will deliver us from the Assyrian when he attacks our land and when he tramples our territory" (Mic. 5:2-6). This is a somewhat difficult passage, because it appears that Micah combines the events of Jesus' first coming alongside of aspects of His second coming. **What can we glean from this passage?**

(1. One who is destined to rule in Israel will come out of Bethlehem of Judah.

(2. His "goings forth", or His origin, is from long ago, from eternity. This seems to indicate at least an existence long before His birth.

(3. He will take His stand to shepherd His flock in Yahweh's strength, and in the glory of His name.

(4. His flock will abide, because He will be great to the ends of the earth.

(5. This One will be our Peace.

(6. He will deliver Israel from the "Assyrians", when they attack. -- This did not happen in the time of Micah, or in the years following. The kingdom of Assyria was defeated by the Babylonians, and ceased being a national entity, or a recognized people group. There are no "Assyrians" today. However, the location of Assyria is spoken about in other prophecies as a gathering place for the nations that will come against Israel in the last days (Ezk. 38,39; Zech. 12-14).

In fulfillment of this prophecy, we read in the book of Luke how Caesar Augustus put forth a decree that all the inhabited earth of his domain should be enrolled in a census. Each one was to return to the city of his birth. **As a result of this, Joseph and his betrothed wife, Mary, went up to Bethlehem to be counted.** Joseph was of the house and lineage of David, and Bethlehem was his ancestral home (Lk. 2:1-4). While they were there, Mary gave birth to her firstborn son, whom they named Jesus (Y'shua = Yahweh's salvation), according to the angelic revelation given to both parents independently (Lk. 1:31-33; Matt. 1:20,21). **The angel, Gabriel, had told Mary, "He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David; ³³ and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and His kingdom will have no end"** (Lk. 1:32-33). This is chronologically the first reference to the Kingdom of God in the NT era. **Interestingly, the first direct reference to this passage in Micah in the NT is by the chief priests and scribes.** After a caravan of wise men from the east came in search of the newborn King of the Jews (Matt. 2:2), Herod the Great inquired of the priests and scribes where the Messiah would be born, according to OT prophecy. They are the first to quote Micah 5:2. **Later on, about six months prior to the end of Jesus' ministry, those arguing about Jesus' identity reference this verse, saying, "Has not the Scripture said that the Christ comes from the descendants of David, and from Bethlehem, the village where David was?"** (Jn. 7:42). **Everyone acquainted with the Scriptures knew of this prophecy.**

So, we know the time of His appearing would be during the reign of Roman rulers, and that He would be born in Bethlehem of Judea. Anyone else even remotely fit these two simple delineating prophecies?