

Micah 3 advent 4

Our Old Testament Lesson from Micah is the prophecy that the scribes look up at King Herod and the Wise Men's request, to see where the New King is to be born. We of course know Herod the great, that paranoid man of history, we know his motives for wanting to find the king – to “worship him”? No, to eliminate him.

The wise men, however, actually do go to worship him. They go to worship this King they had heard was coming through study of God's Word and His Spirit.

And so they and we learn, as Micah teaches, The King will be from Bethlehem.

But the Micah passage doesn't just show where this King will be born, it shows a bit of his character, or at least, what he will do.

We first note that he will come from so small a place it is hardly a clan of Judah. The folks who barely get a seat at the table of Judah's deliberations. And why not? God likes an underdog story. Just as he did with the same town when he took the youngest and smallest son to be king – king David. Now one greater than David will come of his lineage and the same city.

And so this King will be from Bethlehem and lowly, but greater than David.

And this New King's origin will be “from of old, from ancient days.” And we might think, Ok, this means he will have a deep lineage. But, perhaps something to reflect on: wouldn't any Israelite or Descendent of David be able to claim that? Wouldn't anyone in that town be able to say, if this is referring to lineage, “my origin is of old, from ancient days?” Doesn't exactly narrow down who this King might be. And if the purpose of prophecy is that we might recognize

or at least learn of this King, why mention this at all if it doesn't point to something unique about the king?

So perhaps this isn't referring just to lineage. But perhaps this King would be – Ancient of Days, could this King be “before Abraham I AM”? Could he be “in the beginning. With God and God?” Could this King be something, someone beyond all other Kings?

This King from Bethlehem, will be lowly but greater than David, and He will be of Old.

The “therefore” in verse three is challenging. It seems that since God has appointed a time for a King to come, the meantime will be a time of waiting, and even judgment. This is, undoubtedly a reference to the exile in 587BC, where Israel is taken captive into Babylon. And this exile will remain until She, Mary, gives birth to this New King. Which would fulfill the prophecy that the new king comes from a stump of Jesse (David's Father)'s lineage. And of course, you only get a stump if something is cut down – so yes there will be judgment.

But how can this be that God's people are given over to judgment until the child is born, when we know the Israelites were released from Babylon by the persian King Cyrus nearly 500 years before Jesus was born? I think this invites us to reflect first, on: do we want to chastise God for relenting of his judgment? Or should we praise him for that?

But even more, let us not forget that some of God's people stayed in Babylon. Queen Esther for example, saves the multitude of Israelites from destruction in Babylon, AFTER, Cyrus set them free from slavery. Which means there is this scattered remnant of God's people around the world, and then, on Christmas, what do we find? Wise men from the East (from Babylon?) coming to pay homage to a King!

And so the fulfillment of verse three is found in this King who will unite all of God's people from Babylon, or Roman occupation, or from any nation, under his banner. And, dare I say, his banner lifted up is a cross? Don't believe me? John 12:32 "And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself." Isaiah 5:26 "He will lift a banner to the nations from afar, and will whistle to them from the ends of the earth; and behold, they will come with speed swiftly." Song of Songs 2:4, "He has taken me to the banquet hall, and His banner over me is love." Show me more love than a cross! The banner imagery is rich in the Bible and points to the cross, if anyone is interested in a fuller word-study, I have a topic for you to research!

This King from Bethlehem will be lowly but greater than David, he will be of old and will unite his people the world over under his banner – the cross.

Verse 4, how can we miss it? "He will shepherd his people." The 23rd Psalm – he is the Rod and Staff that comforts us through the valley of the shadow of death to eternal life. As Jesus himself proclaims in John 10 that he is the Good Shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep and he knows them and gives them eternal life and they will never perish and no one can snatch them out of his hand. For he and the Father are One.

And if he is One with the Father then of course "he shepherds in the strength of the Lord, of Yahweh." And, of course, his sheep will dwell secure, when he sees them to eternal life where the Lord, Rev. 7 Will shelter God's people with His presence and wipe away all tears.

Until that day, let us not forget that the Shepherd King is still with us so that we might dwell securely even now. There is nothing in the valley of the shadow of death near as strong or scary as our God, and he has pledged himself to us. Why should we not dwell secure? Easier to say when you aren't dying or scared or persecuted, yes, but true nonetheless.

This King from Bethlehem will be lowly but greater than David, he will be of old, he will unite his people under his banner, and he will shepherd them through a valley to eternal life.

And he will be great, his name known across all the earth, until every knee bows. And he will be his people's peace, bringing peace between God and man, as we see in our epistle lesson, a sacrifice that can actually fulfill the will and law of God, who will, by his blood sanctify his people, that we might stand before God in His Kingdom, in peace.

He also brings peace between his people, it may be hard to see, yes, but is there any apology and forgiveness among his people – thanks be to God for that!

Is there any peace, from this King, in the face of enemies: sin, death, persecution, the devil and his lies? Does this King not give us a strong word of forgiveness, courage, and life – even as he is Risen? Does His Spirit not come in time of need to strengthen us in such times?

Yes This King from Bethlehem will be of old, he will be lowly but greater than David, he will unite his people under his banner of the cross, he will shepherd them through a valley to eternal life, and because of that work done for them, for you, you will have peace.

It's all there in Micah. It's all fulfilled in Christ the King. It was all part of the plan, a plan carried out for you. So may the peace of God which surpasses all understanding keep your hearts and minds in the King, Christ Jesus. Amen.