

Micah 5:2-5a

2 But you, O Bethlehem of Ephrathah, who are one of the little clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to rule in Israel, whose origin is from of old, from ancient days. 3 Therefore he shall give them up until the time when she who is in labor has brought forth; then the rest of his kindred shall return to the people of Israel. 4 And he shall stand and feed his flock in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God. And they shall live secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth; 5 and he shall be the one of peace. (NRSV)

Micah was a younger contemporary of Isaiah, a prophet from a small village south west of Jerusalem. The prophecy concerning the Messiah is good news of hope from the hard times of the Exile. During this time period, Assyria has grown from a city state to become the greatest empire of that time due to ambitious, aggressive, and cruel military and political leaders. Now it poses a threat to the Middle East posing great danger to the existence of Israel and Judah.

Micah is one of the earlier prophets. His ministry starts after the kingdom divided and before the Exile begins and continues during the early years of the Exile. Micah began his prophesy shortly after Jotham, the son of Uzziah, was king of Judah. Jotham was a good king, he followed the directives of the Lord when society was otherwise full of paganism. A year later Ahaz, son of Jotham, became king of Judah. He was a bad king. He supported cult practices, child sacrifice, pagan idolatry, and witchcraft.

The Exile begins as the Assyrian empire wiped out Israel, captured Samaria, and the ten tribes of Israel are captive, conquered, and destroyed. The existence of Judah is threatened and the population of Jerusalem expands due to an influx of refugees from Samaria. Judah ended up lasting another 136 years after Israel fell. They did better because some of their kings were good and God allowed time to for repentance. After Israel had fallen, Hezekiah, son Ahaz, became king. He was a good king of Judah. He understood that God does not tolerate the worship of idols. He stuck down altars and destroyed idol worship. The prophecy of Micah was during the reign of these three kings of Judah – one good, one bad, and another good one.

Micah has a strong connection with the poor and stern words for those who exploit the poor. He also targeted the abuse of power and privilege of the elite that got got their wealth through extortion. Merchants were cheating people, judges were taking bribes, false prophets and priests were saying what people paid to hear. Instead of serving God they were serving the ambitions of the political and religious leaders. The rulers lived in luxury and preserved their power and the common people worshiped idols.

The ministry of Micah fits the typical prophetic pattern. First is the theological interpretation of current events. Doomsday is coming, the kingdom will fall, and they will pay for their sins. Then he addressed the problem of apostasy, corruption, and injustice for the poor. He condemned their opulent lifestyle, degrading wages, and oppression. God does not accept the worship practice of people engaged in unjust social and economic practices. Acceptable worship includes justice, kindness, and humility. Then he warned of the consequences of their failure to listen, repent, and turn to God. The kingdom will fall and Jerusalem will be destroyed. The call for repentance is issued calling for social reform and religious reformation. Then there is the good news of God's grace.

Restoration is in their future. Nations will make pilgrimage to the ideal king. The Messiah of Bethlehem will bring the ultimate hope to the people

Today's Scripture is one of the most used during the Christmas season. This is because it is so rich in meaning. The profound prophecy of the coming Lord with its accurate precision was given centuries in advance. The Lord says Bethlehem, you are but a small Judean village, and you will be the birthplace of my King whose family line goes back to ancient times. God will abandon the people to their enemies until the birth of her son. Then the scattered remnants of Israel will be reunited with their own people. When he comes, he will rule his people with the strength and majesty of God himself. People all over the earth will acknowledge his greatness and he will bring peace.

Messianic Prophecy is woven throughout the scriptures but people were confused about what would happen and when. There was a long gap of four centuries between the prophecy and the Lord's birth. Most people went along with life unaware of the Lord's presence when he arrived. Only a handful paid attention and sought out the Lord.

I hope you are able to recognize the pattern that the prophets address. The rampant idolatry is accompanied by greed and injustice. This leads to destruction. Reformation comes only after repentance. The lesson is to pay attention, not just to what is going on in your life but the world events. Do not get complacent with mainstream society. Read and study the word of God. Worship and pray to God frequently. Lead others to the Good News of the risen Lord. Never cease following the lessons of Jesus and be sure to express your thanks to God by being a blessing to others.