

THE KING FROM BETHLEHEM

Micah 5:1-4

Jelšava, 25 December 2015

Micah 5:1-4 Now muster your troops (Jer 5:7), O daughter of troops; siege is laid against us; with a rod they strike the judge of Israel on the cheek. ² But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler 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 given birth; then the rest of his brothers shall return to the people of Israel. ⁴ And he shall stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God. And they shall dwell secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth.

עַתָּה תִּתְגַדְּדִי בַת־גְּדוּד מִצֹּר שֵׁם עָלֵינוּ בְּשֶׁבֶט יָבֹוּ עַל־הַלְחִי אֶת שֹׁפֵט יִשְׂרָאֵל ^{5:1} וְאַתָּה בֵּית־לָחֶם אֶפְרַתָּה צְעִיר לְהֵיוֹת בְּאֶלְפֵי יְהוּדָה מִמֶּנּוּךְ לִי יֵצֵא לְהֵיוֹת מוֹשֵׁל בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל וּמוֹצְאָתוֹ מִקֶּדֶם מִיָּמֵי עוֹלָם ² לָכֵן יִתְנַחֵם עַד־עַתָּה יוֹלְדָה וְיִלְדָה וְיִחַר אֶחָיו יָשׁוּבוּן עַל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל ³ וְעַמֹּד וְרָעָה בְּעֵז יְהוָה בְּנֶאֱוֹן שֵׁם יְהוָה אֱלֹהָיו וְיִשְׁבֹּוּ כִּי־עַתָּה יִגְדַּל עַד־אֶפְסֵי־אָרֶץ

(Slovak Ecum) 4:13 Teraz si však urob krvavé zárezy (Dt 14:1), zbojnícka dcéra. Dostali sme sa do obkľúčenja. Palicou budú biť po tvári sudcu Izraela.

(Rohacek) Teraz sa sober v čatu, dcéro čaty! Obľahni nás; palicou bijú sudcu Izraelovho na líce.

Teraz sa zorad' do boja, dcéra bojového šiku, sme obkľúčení. Sudca Izraela dostane palicou po ústach.

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0. INTRODUCTION: THE EXPECTED KING IN AN UNEXPECTED MANNER

- getting the truth of Christmas is like breaking the shell of a walnut to get to the kernel

0.1 IT'S CHRISTMAS AGAIN!

- the importance of repetition (**Phil 3:1** ...To write the same things to you is no trouble to me and is safe for you. **2Pt 1:12** Therefore I intend always to remind you of these qualities, though you know them)

- the inexhaustibility of the Scriptures ([OWEN]...the stores of truth laid up in it are inexhaustible...)¹
- "I can't imagine a man really enjoying a book and reading it only once" (C. S. LEWIS to Arthur Greeves)

0.2 THE CONTEXT OF THE PROPHECY OF MICAH

- "...the most famous of all on account of its prediction that the Messiah – a theological term for David redivivus in his ideal son – would be born in Bethlehem (Matt 2:6), also progresses from a present distressful situation in 4:14(5:1) to a future salvation."²
- (בֵּית־לְחָם) ↔ (בֵּית־גְּרִיד) (?)

0.2.1 HISTORY

- Striking on the cheek is a deadly insult, only possible if the victim is defeated and powerless (1 Kgs 22:24; Amos 3:30; cf. Matt 5:39).³ → the type of the Messiah (**Mt 27:30** And they spit on him and took the reed and struck him on the head.)

Micah called the Israelites to prepare for war and reminded them that they had often engaged in war by referring to them as a "daughter of troops" (בֵּית־גְּרִיד). This expression means that Jerusalem was a city marked by warfare. Jerusalem's rich had been at war with the poor (2:8; 3:2-3, 9-10; 7:2-6), but now their external enemies would wage war against them. These enemies had laid siege against them (2Ki 24:10; 25:1-2; Jer 52:5; Eze 4:3, 7; 5:2) and would even smite Israel's judge on the cheek (4:2-3), a figure for humiliating Him (cf. 1 Kings 22:24; Job 16:10; Lam. 3:30).⁴

0.2.2 LITERARY CONTEXT⁵

- A The Lord strengthens a remnant (4:6-7a)
- B Dominion restored (4:7b-8)
- C Zion and her king are humiliated (4:9-10)
- D Zion saved from the present crisis (4:11-13)
- C' Zion and her king are humiliated (5:1)
- B' Dominion restored (5:2-6)
- A' The Lord strengthens a remnant (5:7-9)⁸¹

0.2.3 BETHLEHEM

- today: [Wiki] The 2007 PCBS census, ...revealed a population of 25,266
- Betlehem: "It was a small town in the tribe of Judah, built on the slope of a ridge, about six Roman miles to the west by south of Jerusalem, and originally celebrated as the birth-place of David, the first of the line of Jewish kings. Ephratha Gn 48:7, or, as it is commonly written, with the h-paragogic, Ephratha, appears from the passage just cited to have been the original name of the place. This word has much the same signification as Beth-Lehem, being derived from פֶּרֶה, "to be fruitful"; and no doubt the place received both names from the fertility of the region."⁶

"But **thou**". This marks out the structure. Cp. 4:8 ("And you, O tower of the flock, hill of the daughter of Zion, to you shall it come, the former dominion shall come, kingship for the daughter of Jerusalem.") with 5:2. Quoted in Matt. 2:5,6. John 7:42. Beth-lehem Ephratah. The full name given, as in Gn 35:19, thus connecting Gn 35:21 with Mic 4:8 little = too little [to rank among]. Cp. 1Cor 1:27-29. thousands = districts (1Sa 23:23).⁷

1. OUR ATTITUDE TOWARDS ISRAEL/JEWS

- history: from particularity (Bethlehem, Judah birthplace) → to universality (the whole world ruled)

¹ OWEN, J. *Causes, Ways and Means of Understanding the Mind of God*, Works IV, p. 205

² WALTKE, B. C. *A Commentary on Micah*, Grand Rapids : Eerdmans, 2007, p. 293.

³ JENSON, P. P. *Obadiah, Johan, Micah*, New York : T&T Clark, 2008, p. 156

⁴ CONSTABLE, T. L. *Notes on Micah*, 2007.

⁵ CONSTABLE, T. L. *Notes on Micah*, 2015.

⁶ HENDERSON, E. *The Book of the Twelve Minor Prophets*, London : Hamilton, Adams, 1858, p. 248.

⁷ *The Companion Bible*.

- for us: from universality (celebrations) → to particularity (attitude towards historical realities)

- Love expressed in addressing the town “thou Bethlehem, Ephrathah” – personification,
- Even in Judah Bethlehem was not important!
- “Judah” – the tribe that was promised leadership (**Gn 49:10** The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until tribute comes to him; and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples.)
- *great* things are being realized in *small* realities → making things “great” often is the way of how we get rid of them becoming too personal

1.1 THE PROBLEM OF ANTISEMITISM

- You cannot love the King of the Jews if you do not love his subjects
- “Seventy years after the Holocaust, anti-Semitism is again growing more virulent in Europe. From Toulouse to Paris, London to Berlin, Brussels to Copenhagen, Jews are being harassed, assaulted and even killed.”⁸
- You cannot love Yahweh and not to love Abraham and his children at the same time!

1.2 SALVATION IS FROM THE JEWS

- **John 4:22** ... we worship what we know, for **salvation is from the Jews**.
- salvation “from God” → the gift of God; salvation “from the Jews” → the channel;
- “Jewish God” is the *real* God → Jewish history is the *salvation* history... to know God we need to know the *history of Israel* (“Jews”)
- Judaism of the Talmud and the faith of the OT → if I want to *know* God I must *obey* Him first!
- Greeks: *explanation* (philosophy); Hebrews: *extrication* (exodus);
- “VYSVETLENIE” ↔ “VYSLOBODENIE”
- ARISTOTLE: “god” to explain the universe ↔ MOSES: the universe to love God (a different centre!)

2. OUR ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE ORDINARY

- history: from the mundane → to the glorious
- for us: from the glorious → to the mundane

- “ordinary” = belonging to the regular or usual order or course; having a place in a fixed or regulated sequence; occurring in the course of regular custom or practice; regular, normal, customary, usual. ...Of common or everyday occurrence; frequent: abundant. *Obs.* Not distinguished by rank or position; belonging to the commonalty; of low degree; pertaining to, or characteristic of, the common people; common, vulgar; unrefined, low, coarse. *Obs.*⁹

2.1 OUR DEEP DESIRE: TO BE SPECIAL (→ GLORY)

- advertising (be different!)
- our striving (temple of Artemis – burned by a madman named **Herostratus** in 356 BC)

2.2 GOD’S AFFIRMATION OF THE ORDINARY

- ...ruler in Israel, whose origin is from of old, from ancient days ⇒ eternity revealed in temporariness

[CHAMBERS] The saint recognises in all the ordinary circumstances of his life the hand of God and the rule of God, and Jesus says we cannot do that unless we are born from above (rv mg). In the beginning we only discern the rule of God in exceptional things, in crises like a friendship, or marriage, or death, but that is an elementary stage.¹⁰ — Depression is apt to turn us away from the ordinary commonplace things of God’s

⁸ <http://www.usnews.com/opinion/blogs/world-report/2015/04/02/europe-has-a-problem-with-virulent-anti-semitism> (21/12/2015)

⁹ *Oxford English Dictionary*, OUP 2009.

¹⁰ CHAMBERS, O. *The Psychology of Redemption*. In *Complete Works* p. 1069.

creation, but whenever God comes, the inspiration is to do the most natural simple things—the things we would never have imagined God was in, and as we do them we find He is there.¹¹

- my “incarnation” → my living the everyday life in the Spirit – **2Cor 3:3** you are a letter from Christ delivered by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.

3. OUR ATTITUDE TOWARDS POSTPONEMENTS (LONG WAITING)

- | |
|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • history: from waiting → to fulfillment (the first Christmas) • for us: from fulfillment → to waiting (the Second Coming) |
|---|

- **Hope** is the expected future emotionally *experienced now*... without hope, it's *instant gratification*:

[*Impulse Society*] Under our escalating drive for quick “returns,” our whole socioeconomic system is turning on itself. Our traditions of collective action and personal commitment are fraying. Our economy struggles to generate the kind of long-term, broadly based prosperity it once provided—and worse, now seems locked in an intensifying cycle of overshoot and collapse. Most alarmingly, our political institutions, which not so long ago could mobilize resources and people to make real progress, now shy away from complex, long-term challenges such as education reform or resource depletion—or the financial reforms needed to prevent the next meltdown. Consider this one fact: the worst recession in three-quarters of a century should have served as a society-wide reset, a chance to rethink a socioeconomic model based on automatic upgrades and short-term gains. Instead, we’ve continued to focus our economic energies, entrepreneurial talents, and innovation on getting the biggest returns in the shortest time possible. Worse, we’ve done so despite the fact that, thanks to our failing economic model, more and more of us can no longer afford to keep up with the treadmill of ever-faster gratification—a frustration not unconnected to the strains of angry populism now paralyzing our politics.¹²

3.1 THE “INSTANT GENERATION”

- ...economic system that routinely mistakes want for need
- buy now, pay later...
- Infants function exclusively in the realm of instant gratification—crying until their specific need is gratified. → maturity comes with learning to *wait* –

3.2 WAITING FOR THE SECOND COMING

- “Advent” = *adventus* = a coming, approach, arrival →

[Mic 5:2 ↔ Zec 9:9] All the events between these two make up the period we call “the first Advent”, and thus are typical of the “second Advent”; the coming forth being 1Thess. 4:16, and the coming unto being 1Thess 5:2-3, and 2Thess 2:8 : the former being in grace, the latter in judgment. A similar period may elapse in the antitypical comings as in the typical comings of 5. 2, and Zech. 9:9.¹³

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[CHAMBERS] “One of the greatest strains in life is the strain of waiting for God. (“**Rev 3:10** because you have kept my word about patient endurance, I will keep you from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world”) God takes the saints like a bow which He stretches and at a certain point the saint says, “I can’t stand any more,” but God does not heed, He goes on stretching because He is aiming at His mark, not ours, and the patience of the saints is that they “hang in” until God lets the arrow fly.¹⁴

4. TO REMEMBER

- Christmas is a “flower” between a very deep humiliation and a very long waiting.
- To move the experience of celebration from holidays into everyday life we need to understand its Jewishness, commonplace-like appearance, coming when all hopes were almost lost.

¹¹ CHAMBERS, O. *My utmost for his highest*. In *Complete Works*, p. 750.

¹² ROBERTS, P. *The Impulse Society*, New York : Bloomsbury, 2014, p. 4.

¹³ *Companion Bible*,

¹⁴ CHAMBERS, O. *God's Workmanship*. In *Complete Works*, p. 463.

- The story of Christmas has not ended – we are still waiting for the grandiose finale of God fulfilling his promises of the new world.