

THE PROPHETIC IMPORTANCE OF BETHLEHEM

When Herod got wind that “the King of the Jews” had been born, he called for the Jewish Bible scholars to inform him WHERE he was to be born.

Matthew 2:5 (NKJV)

5 So they said to him, “In Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it is written by the prophet:

Note they didn’t even have to research this issue. They knew the Bible well. They knew right off that it was written by the prophet Micah that the Messiah was to be born in Bethlehem of Judea. This is a great warning that people can intellectually know a lot about the Bible and yet not know God.

Micah 5:2 (NKJV)

2 “But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, Though you are little among the thousands of Judah, Yet out of you shall come forth to Me The One to be Ruler in Israel, Whose goings forth are from of old, From everlasting.”

“Everlasting” is literally “the days of eternity” denoting Messiah’s existence in eternity past.

What an amazing verse which clearly these religious leaders did not understand. They understood properly that this was about the Messiah and that He would be born in Bethlehem, but they completely overlooked that He would be One whose goings forth are from everlasting indicating He was an eternal being. How could it be that one Who is from everlasting could be born in Bethlehem? Well, that was the riddle of the OT which is answered in the NT in the sense that we now see that Jesus is both God and Man in One person.

Bethlehem was the birthplace of David in the OT (cf. 1 Sam. 16:1) and therefore fitting that prophetically his greater Son the Messiah would also be born there. The Davidic connection continues to be emphasized (cf. Jn. 7:42). Bethlehem was located about 5 miles south of Jerusalem.

Matthew 2:6 (NKJV)

6 ‘But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, Are not the least among the rulers of Judah; For out of you shall come a Ruler Who will shepherd My people Israel.’ ”

In verse 6 we see a paraphrased quote of Micah 5:2 which is conflated with “**Who will shepherd My people Israel**” from 2 Sam. 5:2. Note that **Bethlehem Ephrathah** in Micah 5:2 is translated as “**Bethlehem, in the**

land of Judah” here in Matt. 2:6. This Bethlehem (meaning “house of bread”) in Judah was originally called Ephrathah (meaning “fruitful”) in Genesis 35:19. Thus, it is distinguished from another Bethlehem of Zebulun in the region of Galilee as seen in Josh. 19:15.

This detail is important! You see there were 2 towns called Bethlehem in Israel and the Messiah 700 years before He was born was prophesied by the prophet Micah to be born in Bethlehem in Judah – not Bethlehem in Galilee. The true Messiah had to be born in the right place – in the right Bethlehem.

When we were in Israel our Jewish guide who was an unbeliever took us to a spot in Jerusalem where we could look over into Bethlehem. The Arabs run Bethlehem so he as a Jew was not welcome there. As he did so he told us about how Jesus was born in Bethlehem. I then said, ***“Why?”*** and he retorted, ***“Because I said so”***. To which I then responded, ***“No, because the prophet said so.”*** It was a tense moment but also a quiet one. This happened where it did (in Bethlehem of Judea) because the prophet Micah, under inspiration, said it would. This was fulfilled prophecy given 700 years in advance. Only God could do this!

The modified quote from Micah 5:2 ***“you are little”*** to ***“Are not the least”*** as seen in Mt. 2:6 has the sense that although Bethlehem was small, yet because of the Ruler Who would come from her this lowly little town would be exalted.

“Matthew is repeating what the scribes and chief priests said. In their zeal to honor David, the great king, and his birthplace, they altered the text to elevate the character and importance of this historically significant site.” – ***Ed Glasscock***

And yet, in the sovereignty of God, what they had to say was true (cf. Jn. 11:49-52). Rulers like Herod had little or no regard for a little place like Bethlehem, and yet because of the word that this Ruler (“the King of the Jews”) was coming from there, it all of a sudden acquired great importance.

“Micah emphasizes what made Bethlehem great, the birth of the Messiah, and Matthew asserts that Bethlehem consequently was not unimportant.” – ***The Moody Bible Commentary***

And then Matthew 2:6 combines the truth that this Messiah figure would be both a Ruler and a Shepherd for His people Israel (cf. Micah 5:4; Ezek. 34:23). He would be a Shepherd-King. With people like Herod in charge, they were in definite need of Shepherding care.

