

Micah 5:2

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

But thou, Beth-lehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting.

Analysis

This verse contains one of the Old Testament's clearest Messianic prophecies, precisely fulfilled in Jesus Christ's birth. "But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah" identifies the specific location—not just Bethlehem ("house of bread") but Bethlehem Ephratah ("fruitful") to distinguish it from Bethlehem in Zebulon (Joshua 19:15). This small town six miles south of Jerusalem was David's birthplace (1 Samuel 17:12), making it significant in redemptive history as the royal city.

"Though thou be little among the thousands of Judah" acknowledges Bethlehem's insignificance—it wasn't a major city, military fortress, or administrative center. The phrase "thousands" (alafim) refers to clans or tribal divisions. Among Judah's family groups, Bethlehem ranked low in size, power, and prestige. This sets up divine reversal: God chooses the small, weak, and despised to accomplish His greatest purposes (1 Corinthians 1:27-29), humbling human pride and glorifying His sovereign grace.

"Yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me" prophesies the Messiah's emergence from this humble town. The pronoun "he" (li) is emphatic and singular, pointing to one specific individual—the ruler promised to David's line. "That is to be ruler in Israel" uses moshel (ruler, governor), indicating kingly authority. "Whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting" (motsa'otav miqqedem mimei olam) is remarkable—this coming ruler existed before His earthly birth, from ancient

times, even from eternity. This verse thus affirms both Messiah's human birth (in Bethlehem) and divine pre-existence (from everlasting)—a mystery fulfilled in Christ's incarnation.

Historical Context

Matthew 2:1-6 records this prophecy's fulfillment. When wise men asked Herod where the King of the Jews was born, Jerusalem's chief priests and scribes immediately quoted Micah 5:2, identifying Bethlehem. Though written 700 years earlier, Micah's prophecy remained recognized Messianic expectation. Mary and Joseph traveled to Bethlehem for Caesar Augustus's census (Luke 2:1-7), providentially ensuring Jesus's birth in the prophesied location despite their residence in Nazareth.

The phrase "from everlasting" (mimei olam) is significant. In Hebrew thought, olam denotes indefinite past or future—often translated "eternal" though its precise meaning depends on context. Applied to God or divine attributes, it indicates true eternity. Micah's use here, combined with "goings forth" (plural), suggests the coming ruler's activity extends into immemorial past—He existed and acted before His human birth. This prepared for New Testament revelation of Christ's pre-existence and deity (John 1:1-3, 14; Colossians 1:16-17; Hebrews 1:2-3).

Bethlehem's significance extends beyond geography. As David's birthplace, it connects Messiah to Davidic covenant promises (2 Samuel 7:12-16). David, though youngest son of an insignificant family, became Israel's greatest king. Jesus, born in David's town, fulfills and transcends Davidic kingship—He is David's greater son (Matthew 22:41-46) whose kingdom has no end (Luke 1:32-33).

Related Passages

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Study Questions

1. How does God's choice of insignificant Bethlehem reveal His values and purposes in contrast to human wisdom?
2. What does Micah's prophecy of Messiah's eternal pre-existence teach about Jesus's identity and nature?
3. How should fulfilled prophecy like Micah 5:2 strengthen our confidence in Scripture's divine inspiration and authority?

Interlinear Text

לְהִיּוֹת	צָעִיר	אַפְּרִתָּה	בֵּית	לְ	לְ	בְּתִים	בֵּית	אֶת	הָ
H1961	H6810	H672	H1035	H0	H0	But thou Bethlehem	Ephratah	though thou be little	H1961
בְּאֶלְף	אֵצֶן	מִתְּבָנָה	יְהוָה	הָ	לְ	מִתְּבָנָה	יְהוָה	הָ	בְּאֶלְף
among the thousands	of Judah	H4480	H3063	H0	H0	yet out of thee shall he come forth	H3318	H0	
לְהִיּוֹת	בְּיִשְׁרָאֵל	לְ	מִזְאַת	וְ	לְ	מִזְאַת	וְ	בְּיִשְׁרָאֵל	לְ
H1961	H4163	H3478	H1961	H0	H0	unto me that is to be ruler	in Israel	whose goings forth	H1961
עֹלָם	מִימִן	מִקְדָּם	have been from of old	from everlasting	H5769				
H6924	H3117	H5769							

Additional Cross-References

Matthew 2:6 (References Israel): And thou Bethlehem, in the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda: for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel.

John 7:42 (Parallel theme): Hath not the scripture said, That Christ cometh of the seed of David, and out of the town of Bethlehem, where David was?

Psalms 90:2 (Eternal Life): Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God.

Isaiah 11:1 (Parallel theme): And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots:

Zechariah 9:9 (Parallel theme): Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass.

Colossians 1:17 (Parallel theme): And he is before all things, and by him all things consist.

Genesis 49:10 (Parallel theme): The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be.

1 Samuel 17:12 (Parallel theme): Now David was the son of that Ephrathite of Beth-lehem-judah, whose name was Jesse; and he had eight sons: and the man went among men for an old man in the days of Saul.

Revelation 19:16 (Parallel theme): And he hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS.

Genesis 48:7 (Parallel theme): And as for me, when I came from Padan, Rachel died by me in the land of Canaan in the way, when yet there was but a little way to come unto Ephrath: and I buried her there in the way of Ephrath; the same is Beth-lehem.