

THE RULER WHO CARES FOR HIS PEOPLE

Leader pages on pp. 122-125

THE POINT:
JESUS LEADS AND CARES FOR HIS PEOPLE.

MICAH 5:2-5A; MATTHEW 2:1-6,9-11

MEMORY VERSE

Mic. 5.2 Bethlehem Ephrathah, you are small among the clans of Judah; one will come from you to be ruler over Israel for me. His origin is from antiquity, from ancient times. ³ Therefore, Israel will be abandoned until the time when she who is in labor has given birth; then the rest of the ruler’s brothers will return to the people of Israel. ⁴ He will stand and shepherd them in the strength of the LORD, in the majestic name of the LORD his God. They will live securely, or then his greatness will extend to the ends of the earth. ^{5a} He will be their peace.

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Matt. 2:1 After Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of King Herod, wise men from the east arrived in Jerusalem, ² saying, “Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star at its rising and have come to worship him.” ³ When King Herod heard this, he was deeply disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. ⁴ So he assembled all the chief priests and scribes of the people and asked them where the Messiah would be born. ⁵ “In Bethlehem of Judea,” they told him, “because this is what was written by the prophet: ⁶ And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah: Because out of you will come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.”

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⁹ After hearing the king, they went on their way. And there it was—the star they had seen at its rising. It led them until it came and stopped above the place where the child was. ¹⁰ When they saw the star, they were overwhelmed with joy. ¹¹ Entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and falling to their knees, they worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts: gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

KEYWORDS

From antiquity (*miqedem*), from ancient times (*miymey olam*) (v. 2)—Both terms can refer just to a very long time ago, perhaps the beginnings of messianic prophecy (Gen. 3:15; 12:3; 49:10) or to eternity (Ps. 74:12; Prov. 8:23; Hab. 1:12).

Wise men (Matt. 2:1)—A term for men from the ancient Middle East who studied the stars to predict the future and who claimed to interpret dreams.

HOW DO WE KNOW JESUS TO BE A GREAT LEADER?

Long before everyone had a camera on their phone, we had to buy film then pay someone to develop that film. The man who brought cameras into every household was George Eastman. The New York Times said of him, “He should be the most thanked man in the world,”⁸ not because of his camera and film, but because of his business practices.

Eastman reduced the work hours of his employees. His company had a medical department and a medical disability fund. He established a retirement plan and life insurance for his employees. He instituted a profit-sharing plan for employees. He hired women and the disabled.

Many companies offer benefits today, but when Eastman did it, it had never been done before. He cared for his employees.

George Eastman’s attitude toward others is commendable, but it pales in comparison to the care of Jesus. As our loving Shepherd, Jesus loves, leads, and cares for us.

Strength of the Lord // Micah 5:2-5a

Prophets are often associated with messages of warning and condemnation. Micah delivered his share of such messages, but he also proclaimed hope to both Judah and Israel. The people of God had been led by a string of weak leaders, and the people longed for hope and peace. Micah pointed to their hope and peace, and it would come through a wholly different and unique Ruler.

This Ruler would come from Bethlehem Ephrathah. While Bethlehem was the birthplace of King David (1 Sam. 16:1), it now seemed to be an insignificant place for a ruler to be born, especially when compared to the great city of Jerusalem only five miles away. The greatest king of the Old Testament was born there, and the King of kings would be born there as well.

For Micah’s contemporaries, their hope and deliverance would not be immediate. In fact, over 700 years would pass before this prophecy was fulfilled. The Jews would undergo



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a season when they would “be abandoned” (v. 3) for their rebellion and sinfulness. This abandonment, though, would not be permanent. From among them would be born a Ruler who would rise and shepherd the people of God. The “rest of the ruler’s brothers” would “return to the people of Israel” (v. 3) through His ministry. Though this could refer to the end of the exile, it more likely refers to the salvation Jesus would bring to the Jews through a relationship with Him.

Micah’s prophecy about the birthplace of Jesus tells us a lot about the kind of ruler He would be. “He will stand and shepherd them in the strength of the LORD” (v. 4). To “stand” means He would assume the role of King. Even the best of rulers with the best intentions can fail, but this King would rule “in the strength of the LORD” (v. 4). He will also rule “in the majestic name of the LORD his God” (v. 4). The King would have a special relationship with God, and His power and majesty would come from God.

The king would not only rule powerfully and perfectly, but He would also rule as a Shepherd. Other passages refer to God as a Shepherd (Ezek. 34:11-16), but the most well-known is Psalm 23. In this psalm, David painted a picture of God as a shepherd who perfectly provides, protects, and guides.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN THAT A KING IS A SHEPHERD?

Sought as King // Matthew 2:1-6

The birth of Jesus in an obscure Jewish village was only known by a small group of people: Mary, Joseph, their families, the residents of Bethlehem, and some shepherds. The news of Jesus’ birth might have spread as the citizens of the village passed on the unusual report from the shepherds. All that changed when strangers arrived in Jerusalem, announcing they were looking for “he who has been born king of the Jews.” This got the attention of King Herod and the whole city.

The first questions I would think anyone would ask of these strangers is, “Who are you and how do you know about this king?” Matthew only told us they were “wise men from the east” (v. 1). “Wise men” is a generic term for men with special training, but it specifically referred to a priestly class in Babylon who advised the kings. Ancient records mention such groups



DIGGING DEEPER THE PROPHET MICAH

Micah is the abbreviated form of the personal name Micaiah, meaning “Who is like Yahweh?” Jeremiah said Micah prophesied during the reign of Hezekiah (Jer. 27:17-18). Micah addressed the political and national crises of his time. He also denounced the religious practices of Judah. Micah warned of impending judgment on God’s people for their disobedience. At the same time he proclaimed messages of hope. Judgment would come, but afterwards God would restore a remnant of the people devoted to Him (Mic. 4:1–13; 7:14–20). Unlike the unjust kings, God would bring a Ruler who would allow the people to live in peace (5:1–5). Ultimately Judah was destroyed in 586 b.c. by the Babylonians, but a remnant returned. Matthew saw in Micah’s hope for a new ruler a description of Christ (Matt. 2:6).

What can the hope of Christ change in today’s world?

in Babylon and Persia. Our word “magic” comes from the Greek word translated “wise men.” They were known for their knowledge and skills in astronomy, government, and religion.



HOW DOES THE SEARCH FOR JESUS BY WISE MEN DEMONSTRATE JESUS' GREATNESS?

These men knew to look for the infant king because they “saw his star at its rising” (v. 2). No one can say with any assurance and finality what exactly they saw. Was it a phenomenon like a supernova? Whatever these men saw, these well-versed men likely connected this unusual sign in the night sky to Balaam’s prophecy in Numbers 24:17: “A star will come from Jacob, and a scepter will arise from Israel.” When they “saw his star at its rising,” they traveled to the place where they thought any Jewish king would be born: Jerusalem.

As word began to spread, King Herod and all who were with him in Jerusalem were deeply disturbed. Herod carried the title of king, but he was not truly a king. He was only half-Jewish, and he would never be the legitimate heir to David’s throne. He carried a great insecurity about his position, so the idea of another king threatened him. Nevertheless, he checked into it and learned of Micah’s prophecy.

Herod was not the only one obsessed with power and status. Many of the Pharisees and religious leaders were also focused on their own power and status. This threat to their self-importance would more greatly play out when Jesus began His ministry. The king of the Jews had come into the world. All who heard the report needed to make a choice: do we accept this child as the long-awaited Messiah and King of the Jews, or do we reject Him? His position as King of kings demands a respond from us too. We either acknowledge His lordship and surrender to Him or we reject Him.

Honored Through Worship

// Matthew 2:9-11

As the wise men traveled the five miles to Bethlehem, they saw a familiar sight. They saw the star they had initially seen at its rising. Stars naturally turned from east to west across God’s heavens, but this unique manifestation apparently traveled south.

We can assume the star at this point was moving since “it came and stopped above the place where the child was” (v. 9).

The men knew their journey was completed. Matthew was generous with the superlatives in capturing their strong feelings; “they were overwhelmed with joy” (v. 10). The Greek phrase is literally translated “overjoyed beyond measure.”

WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE TO WORSHIP JESUS SIMPLY BECAUSE OF WHO HE IS?

Modern portrayals of the Nativity almost always show the wise men visiting Jesus on the night of His birth. However, Herod had all male babies two years old and under in Bethlehem killed (Matt. 2:16), indicating that up to two years had passed since the wise men saw the star—and possibly since Jesus’ birth.

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Joseph and Mary almost surely stayed in Bethlehem until Mary could travel again. In fact, they probably stayed there for the forty days necessary to complete Mary's purification. From Bethlehem, they could easily make the five-mile trip to Jerusalem to offer the sacrifice for Mary's purification (Luke 2:22).

The wise men "presented" their gifts to Jesus. Bringing gifts was particularly important in the ancient Near East when approaching a superior.

- **A gift for His royalty.** Gold is the finest and most precious metal, and it showed great value from the giver to the recipient.
- **A gift for His Deity.** Frankincense is a glittering, odorous gum obtained by making incisions in the bark of several trees. It was essentially used in sacrificial offerings.
- **A gift for His humanity.** Myrrh was a much-valued spice and perfume, used in embalming and perfuming ointments.

These gifts certainly reflect the wise men's worship and devotion. Worship must be our response to the Messiah as well. Jesus came to give us salvation and eternal life with Him.

DID YOU KNOW?

Polaris, commonly called the North Star, is the most important star in earth's sky. Most people believe it's also the brightest, but it ranks 48 on the list of brightest stars. Polaris is important because the axis of the earth is pointed almost directly at the star. Also during the night, it stays in the same spot above the horizon with other stars circling around it. Amazingly, it can help travelers find their way and is more accurate than a compass. The best way to find Polaris is to first find the Little Dipper. Polaris is located at the end of the Little Dipper's handle in the constellation of Ursa Minor. As the centuries go by Polaris will not be our North Star. Because of the gravitational forces of the sun and moon, there will be a gravitational change in the axis. Over time different stars become the North Star. In 400 B.C. during the time of Plato, Kochab was the North Star.⁹

Why do you think God used a star to guide the wise men?

LIVE IT

How should we follow Jesus as our Leader and Shepherd?

As our loving Shepherd, Jesus shows His love in how He leads and cares for us. He is truly all we need. When we rest in Him and surrender to His authority in our lives, we shall not want. Our ultimate leader is Jesus. When we choose to follow Him, we discover He leads us with love, care, and grace. In what ways can you live this out?

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- **Trust the Shepherd.** Trust Jesus to guide you with care. Is there an area in your life where He is calling you to obedience but you're resisting? Spend time acknowledging Him as your Shepherd.
- **Study the Shepherd.** Find occurrences of the word "shepherd" in your Bible. How does this increase your understanding of the ways Jesus cares for His people? Journal your thoughts.
- **Worship the Shepherd.** True worship pours out into every other part of our lives. Spend time this week listing the attributes of God. Carve out time to be alone and worship Him for who He is.

DAILY READINGS

1. JESUS OUR LEADER // MICAH 5:1-2

Many corrupt leaders dot the pages of world history. People have suffered gravely at the hands of Hitler, Stalin, Hussein, Idi Amin, and others. These men ruled with hearts of stone and no consideration for the people. Good leaders are men and women of integrity. Unlike corrupt leaders, they exhibit compassion and kindness toward followers. Even so, they fall short of the leadership of Christ. The word that defines Jesus as a leader is *servant*. He humbled Himself and gave His life for us on a cruel cross. This was an unselfish display of servant leadership. He died for our sins so we would not have to. No human leader would die for someone else. Only a Savior. Only Christ.

Jesus as our Leader deserves our devotion. Let us earnestly seek to obey Him in every way.

2. JESUS OUR HOPE // MICAH 5:2

Stories of crime, sickness, catastrophes, hunger, evil, and other life traumas are reported on daily newscasts. This hopelessness seeps into our daily lives, creating an atmosphere of mental illness, anger, and fear. What's the world to do? What can we do? Don't ignore the Truth. Many years ago, Micah predicted Jesus would come. He was born to bring hope into the world. The hope of Jesus does not dissipate because of the events of our fallen world. So when the walls of hopelessness begin to crowd you in, look to Jesus. He is our Hope for today and for tomorrow. Nothing can destroy this Hope because it's stored for us in heaven.

Celebrate! We have received a real hope that is alive and with us. Our Hope's name is Jesus.

3. JESUS OUR PEACE // MICAH 5:5

Micah predicted Jesus would be our peace. Jesus even described Himself that way. He said, "Peace I leave with you. My peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Don't let your heart be

troubled or fearful" (John 14:27). Unlike the world's peace, which is defined as the absence of conflict, the peace that Christ gives is the assurance that in any situation, we will be okay. Therefore, with Christ's peace, we have no need to fear the present or the future. We can easily receive this peace if we belong to Christ and He is our Lord and Savior. All we have to do is ask, and the peace of God will move into our hearts.

When forces of turmoil war within you, ask Christ for peace. He will honor your request.

4. AN UNJUST WORLD // PROVERBS 21:15

The word *justice* is popular in today's culture. Many people tout racial justice, gun violence, and voting rights among others as they rally for justice. But people face many injustices that threaten or bar them from living as productive and healthy citizens in their communities. And who is the author of injustice—Satan. We live in a fallen world filled with sin, sickness, evil, and injustice. But all is not lost. John reminds us, "The one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world" (1 John 4:4). We live in an evil and unjust world, but God is stronger. He can and will conquer all evil.

The Spirit of God and His Word lives in our hearts. That means we are greater, too.

5. LET JUSTICE ROLL // AMOS 5:24

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. quoted the words of Amos in a speech. He said, "Let justice flow like water, and righteousness, like an unfailing stream."¹⁰ Dr. King lived during a time when injustices to African-Americans were upheld by the laws of the land. Today many of those laws have changed, but in many cases, injustices persist. Just like Amos, Dr. King recognized that God is our defense. He will not tolerate the mistreatment of people. The justice that God establishes will keep rolling like a mighty stream that never dries up.

Trust God to make things right in the land.

“THERE IS NO
FUTURE FOR A PEOPLE
WHO DENY THEIR **PAST.**”¹¹

Adam Clayton Powell, Jr.



SPECIAL FOCUS: SEEKING JUSTICE IN AN UNJUST WORLD

INTRODUCTION

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Our Father loves with no regard to academics, economics, social status, or skin color. However, for those with voices not heard, we must step in. God used the prophet Obadiah to speak clearly and powerfully to the nation of Edom when they were indifferent and self-seeking.

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