

## Micah 5 Bible Notes

**Sunday July 28<sup>th</sup> @ 7.30pm Breakspear Room – an evening all about Micah!**

**Overview:** Chapter 4 contained one of the most famous prophecies of the messianic era or Kingdom of God, with its vision of the nations beating their swords into ploughshares and living in peace.

Chapter Five develops this with a prophecy concerning the figure who will usher in and reign over this kingdom: a kingly figure who will be born in the little town of Bethlehem – insignificant now but once the home of King David, and in the future to be the place from where David's great heir would spring (5:1-5).

The remainder of the chapter turns its gaze back from the Messiah and his kingdom to the here and now: what does it mean for Judah *now* that the Messiah's kingdom will come in the future? Some might have thought (and we might hear their voice in 5:5b-6) that it meant Israel would confidently repel any military assault from her enemies. We've seen from earlier chapters of Micah that this was not his view: Judah could by no means expect to escape from the disasters her leaders and elite had brought upon themselves. Indeed, all the things she relied on for her defence – horses and chariots and alliance with pagan cultures and gods – would soon be stripped from her (5:10-15). Judah would indeed be both a blessing to the nations who would let her be so, and the instrument of judgement on those who would not (5:7-9) – but in both cases what would be seen is the power of God, not conventional military might.

**Things to think about:** It is often said, quite correctly, that biblical prophecy is more about discerning the spiritual heart of the situation actually confronting the prophet in his present, rather than peering into a dim future. Insofar as there is a future reference to most prophecy, it is more in the way of saying: 'if the nation continues to behave in this fashion, this is what will then happen' – which is only *prediction* in the same sense that I predict you will be hurt if you insist on touching

burning coal. Micah 5:2-5, along with some other prophecies (Isaiah 53 being perhaps the stand-out example) is different: here the prophet really does seem to see into the future. He singles out Bethlehem as the birthplace of the Messiah – a town which in Micah's time had little to commend it other than its historic connection with David. If you think that prophecy is really an act of human imagination, you might say that in this prophecy Micah is trying to show God as on the one hand faithful to his promises to David, and on the other as preferring to work through that which is currently insignificant and indeed rather despised. Of course, one might also say that this is not the point *Micah* is trying to make – rather God Himself is making it!

How can the Messiah be the one of peace (5:5), if the beginning of his reign is marked by terrible violence (5:10-15)? One is reminded of Jesus' saying in Matthew's Gospel: 'Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.' (Mt.10:34). We run up again against the Bible's stubborn unwillingness to conform to our desire for everything to be 'nice', which often carries with it a reluctance to see deep rooted evil for what it really is. The Bible is grimly realistic. Much of what is wrong with this world, which keeps it from peace, is so powerful and deeply rooted that ending it will, of necessity, be cataclysmic. There will be no gentle reforming into the Kingdom of God, things will not gradually get better until one day we arrive at the vision of Micah 4. No, the biblical view tends to a darker and fiercer vision: there will indeed be peace and justice, but only on the far side of judgement and doom. A similar understanding is present not just in traditional Christian teaching about 'the end of the world' (or to use the technical term, in Christian eschatology), but even more crucially this is the structure of our faith in the Cross and Resurrection of Jesus. Christians believe, like Micah, that the Messiah will indeed bring in his Kingdom. As part of that coming, judgement must first fall upon God's people and the nations. But the radical thing Christians then do with that ancient Jewish hope is to see that judgement as happening first and foremost on the Cross of Jesus: that Jesus willingly takes onto Himself the doom the prophets once saw as coming for the world.