

THE FRIENDS OF ISRAEL TODAY

December 19, 2015

Chris Katulka, Why Bethlehem?, Part 2

Greetings my friends... and Merry Christmas to you and your family. I hope that in the midst of all of the shopping and party planning in your annual Christmas routine that you're able to stop for a moment and reflect on the joyous moment surrounding the birth of Christ... that you are able to stop for a moment and reflect on God's grace as He sent His Son Jesus to us... Emmanuel... God with us! I know that at the Katulka house while we are excited about giving gifts and getting gifts... we are constantly reminding ourselves and the kids to focus on the true reason for Christmas... and that is the coming of our Saviour... the greatest gift ever given.

Last week we started a series on Micah's prophecy that's found in Micah 5:2... Micah's prophecy vividly painted the place where the Messiah... Jesus Christ would be born... in the tiny city of Bethlehem...

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.”

Last week we looked at how Bethlehem, though very small, was considered a royal city in the eyes of 1st century Jewish people that lived during the days of Jesus... and one of the reasons it was considered a royal city was because it was the place where King David was born... and grew up and was chosen by God to be Israel's king!

We also looked at how Micah alludes to the idea that the Messiah would be more than just a mere man... Micah says that the coming King would come from ancient of days or eternity past... essentially Micah summarizes succinctly story of Jesus' birth in the gospels of Matthew and Luke... all the while showing His deity which the Apostle John wishes to illustrate in John 1!

Now if you missed last week's message you can go to our radio and podcast archives at our [homepage foiradio.org](http://foiradio.org)!

Today I want to focus on one more thing when it comes to Micah's prophecy of Jesus' birth in Bethlehem.

[Music break]

Christmas is a joyous time to celebrate the birth of our Savior, Jesus the Messiah. His arrival marks a moment in human history when “the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.” (John 1:14). The holy God humbled Himself and became human so that He could be present (dwell) with His creation. God’s desire to be present with His people is found all throughout the Scriptures (Exodus 5:8; Exodus 40:35; 1 Kings 8:10; John 1:14; Revelation 21:3), and really, it’s the theme of the entire Bible, that God is fighting to be with His creation to re-establish that unhindered relationship... the way it was in the Garden of Eden in Gen 2.

We often marvel at Micah’s specificity in naming the exact city Mary was to give birth, but it’s hardly ever mentioned that Micah names the precise location around Bethlehem where Jesus was to be born. In an earlier chapter of Micah’s prophecy Micah in chapter 4 verse 8 prophesies exactly where within the city of Bethlehem Christ would be born... listen to this!

“And you, O tower of the flock,
The stronghold of the daughter of Zion,
To you shall it come,
Even the former dominion shall come” (Micah 4:8).

Let me try to bring to life this amazing verse... the “Tower of the flock” in Hebrew is migdal eder, which would have been located on

the outskirts of Bethlehem. The tower of the flock is full of rugged hills where during the days of Jesus shepherds would keep watch over their flocks of sheep. Luke's account of Jesus' birth mentions "Now there were in the same country shepherds living out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night" (Luke 2:8). Luke also notes that Jesus was laid in a manger. A "manger" in Greek could be interpreted as a box where animals feed—a trough. So Micah mentions that Jesus would have been born on the outskirts of Bethlehem... and so it was according to Luke that Jesus was born in the area where Shepherds were keeping their flocks! All the pieces are fitting together!

So the account of Jesus' birth in Luke fits perfectly with Micah's prediction of the future King of Israel being born in the city of Bethlehem (Micah 5:2), specifically in "Migdal Eder" (Micah 4:8).

Now here's what is fascinating... the flocks of sheep that were being watched in Bethlehem that night when Jesus was born... these weren't your average sheep raised for domestic reasons for things like wool and meat. These sheep that surround Jesus at His birth weren't your regular sheep... These sheep had a particular purpose designated and set apart by Jewish law. These sheep were being watched and shepherded for Temple sacrifice according to the ancient Jewish source of law, the Mishnah (Sheq. 7.4).

These sheep that surrounded Jesus at His birth were set aside and had a destiny that defined them. They were purposed for sacrifice. To think that Jesus, the Lamb of God, was born in a field of sheep purposed for sacrifice seems to set in place the destiny of our Messiah even at His birth!

[Music Break]

The events surround the birth of Jesus were no mistake... they were put in place by the Lord to show us who Jesus is and what His destiny was. The prophecies in Micah show us that Jesus was born in a small town... but this small town was full of royal history... making Jesus royal... connecting Jesus with His distant human father... King David. And like King David... Jesus would become Israel's Greatest King!

Jesus is also the Word according to John! The word that became flesh, so that we might fully know the Father. And finally, Jesus' birth in Bethlehem revealed that He came to die so that we could experience the Father's presence in our life today, and even more tangibly in the future.

So this Christmas as you gather with your family and friends to celebrate the humble birth of our Messiah and King... don't forget the reason Christ came... He came to give Himself as a sacrifice that

those who believe in Him... in His birth, in His life, in His Death, Burial and His resurrection would have a reconciled life with the Father and as a result an abundant life both today and when we see our Risen Lord face to face!

I want to encourage you this Christmas season as family is gathered together to stop, open the scriptures and read the story of the birth of Christ from Luke 2. When we all stop together to remember the birth of Christ... it centers us and draws us to worship our Savior.