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Israel's Babe of Bethlehem

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[Pamphlet]

[Front Cover]

Israel's Babe of Bethlehem

[Inserted illustration: 3 wise men, star of Bethlehem]

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[Page 1]

ISRAEL'S BABE OF BETHLEHEM In the great prophecy of Micah we read (5:1-5): "Now shalt thou gather thyself in troops, O daughter of troops: he hath laid siege against us; they shall smite the judge of Israel with a rod upon the cheek. But thou, Bethlehem Ephrathah, which art little to be among the thousands of Judah, out of thee shall one come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting. Therefore will he give them up, until the time that she who travaileth hath brought forth: then the residue of his brethren shall return unto the children of Israel. And he shall stand, and shall feed his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God: and they shall abide; for now shall he be great unto the ends of the earth. And this man shall be our peace." The degradation of the judge of Israel (v.1) is now contrasted with the greatness of the future Ruler of Israel. The prophet has been foretelling blessing at the beginning of chapter 4 and here he indicates the One through whom the blessing comes. The prophecy presents one great Person in three different aspects. In the first place, we see **THE MIGHTY GOD IN ETERNITY** The coming Ruler of Israel comes forth in time, but He is not circumscribed by time. His goings forth, His activities, have been from old, from everlasting. These goings forth were before creation, in creation, in His appearances to the patriarchs, and throughout the Old Testament history of redemption. The phrases of this text are the strongest possible statement of infinite duration in the Hebrew language. We are reminded of the words (Psa. 90:2): "Before the mountains were brought forth, Or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, Even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God." And again (John 1:1): "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." The pre-existence of the Messiah is being taught here, as well as His active participation in ancient times in the purposes of God.

[Page 2]

A young Moslem, learning English from the Bible, came to Luke 23:34, and read, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." Hassan closed the Book, and said, "He was the Son of God. No one else would have prayed for his enemies." The eternal activity of the Messiah proves Him to be the Mighty God. This Scripture portion presents the Messiah not only as the Mighty God in eternity, but, in the second place, as **THE BLESSED BABE IN BETHLEHEM** Micah indicates the birthplace of the Messiah of Israel as Bethlehem Ephrathah, which was about six Roman miles southwest of Jerusalem, and was the birthplace of David. There were two cities by the name of Bethlehem, so this one in Judah is distinguished by the added name, from the Bethlehem which belonged to the tribe of Zebulun, Josh. 19:15. Bethlehem means "house of bread" and Ephrathah comes from a root meaning "fruitful"; thus both names refer to the fertility of the region. The birthplace of the Babe is indicated as being too little to be reckoned among the thousands (the families) of Judah. Micah is pointing out the insignificant character of the village, for we know that it is not mentioned among the cities of Judah in Joshua 15 nor is it in the list of cities of Nehemiah 11. The low condition of the Davidic dynasty is also indicated here. From this small village will come forth unto the Lord the Ruler of Israel. The words "unto me" are important in that they show the coming of this One is to carry out the purposes of God. He comes in the will of the Father to carry out the plan of the Father. Because of the prediction in verse 2, it is clear that Messiah's birth in Bethlehem instead of Jerusalem, which was the capital of the kingdom, could only mean that the family of David had fallen on evil days, that Israel had been given up into the hands of her enemies. And so it was. When the Babe was born in Bethlehem, Israel was writhing under the galling yoke of Roman rule and oppression. The woman who travails to bring forth (v.3) is the nation in general and the virgin Mary in particular. Isaiah the prophet had already foretold of the virgin birth (7:14): "Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: behold, the virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel." See also Revelation 12:1-6. In the time of Herod there was no question in the minds of the chief

[Page 3]

priests and scribes as to the birthplace of the Messiah as a Babe. We read (Mt. 2:4-6): "And gathering together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he (Herod) inquired of them where the Christ should be born. And they said unto him, in Bethlehem of Judaea: for thus it is written through the prophet, And thou Bethlehem, land of Judah, Art in no wise least among the princes of Judah: For out of thee shall come forth a governor, Who shall be shepherd of my people Israel." They knew right well to whom the prophecy of Micah referred. It is said that when Mrs. Booth, who even more than her husband was the life of the Salvation Army, was a little girl running along the road with a hoop and stick, she saw a prisoner dragged away by a constable to the prison. A mob was hooting at the unfortunate culprit, and his utter loneliness and need appealed at once to her heart; it seemed to her that he had not a friend in the world. Quick as a flash she sprang to his side and marched down the street with him, determined that he

should know that there was one soul that felt for him, whether he suffered for his own fault or that of another. So the Lord Jesus, who was the brightness of the Father's glory, condescended to come down to this world, not only to manifest the Father's love for us, but also to identify Himself with us in our suffering and need. Thus He was born a Babe in Bethlehem. But the message of Micah is not concluded yet. He must and will complete the picture for us in setting forth, finally, **THE PEACEFUL RULER IN JERUSALEM** The One who is the Mighty God from all eternity, and became the Babe in the manger at Bethlehem in time, will someday be the Ruler of His people in peace in Jerusalem. Before that rule His own brethren, the people of Israel (v.3), must return to the land of their fathers, a joining together of all parts of the nation, a regathering from world-wide dispersion. Then the rejected One becomes the Shepherd of Israel. He will stand, that is, He will continue as He feeds His flock. He shall have the needs of His people at heart. The office of shepherd expresses His royal care and protection. The concept of feeding has in it the thought of rule as well. All His ministry He will perform in the

[Page 4]

strength of the Lord and in the majesty of the name of the Lord His God. He will have at His disposal infinitely adequate resources, and absolute authority will be His. During His reign in Jerusalem, Israel shall abide; they shall dwell in peace and security. Micah 4:4: "But they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig-tree; and none shall make them afraid: for the mouth of the Lord of hosts hath spoken it." He will be great for His rule and power will be world-wide. Mal. 1:11: "For from the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same my name shall be great among the Gentiles; and in every place incense shall be offered unto my name, and a pure offering: for my name shall be great among the Gentiles, saith the Lord of hosts." What the Messiah's coming will mean for His people and the world, is summed up under the thought of peace. He will be peace: He will have it in Himself and will bestow it on His people. By the blood of His cross He made peace (Eph. 2:14) and He will show Himself to the world as the Prince of Peace (Isa. 9: 6, 7). He will be the Author of peace and will be able to maintain it as well. At the 1907 annual meeting of the British and Foreign Bible Society, the Bishop of Selkirk, Northwest Canada, gave the following witness to the value of Christ and His gospel as a bringer of peace: "As you go down the Mackenzie River from Edmonton, the 2,000 odd miles to reach the Arctic Ocean, every two or three hundred miles you find a place called a Hudson Bay Company post. There is usually a mission in connection with it. You will find around the old Hudson Bay Company's post things like stumps, which have been cut off level with the ground almost. What does that mean? They extend right around the fort. It means that forty-five years ago these Hudson Bay Company people had to have a stockade all around these posts to protect their lives and their property. Now they have been cut down and used for firewood. What has caused that? The light of the Gospel of Christ." It is ever so: when the Gospel with its light comes in, then darkness and strife must flee before it. Dear Jewish reader, Messiah can bring peace into

[Back cover]

your weary heart too. In a coming day He will b--*[illegible]* it for all the world when He rules in righteousness. *[Illegible]* important and determining question for you now *[illegible]*. Does He rule in your heart today? He will com--*[illegible]* today if you open your heart to receive Him, Is--*[illegible]* the blessed Babe of Bethlehem.

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