

Explore the Bible: Humble Beginnings

November 7, 2022

- *The Explore the Bible lesson for Nov. 20 focuses on Micah 4:6-8; 5:1-9.*

Clocking in at 5 feet 2 inches, I am no stranger to smallness. On more than one preaching occasion, I required a stepstool to be seen behind a pulpit made for someone far taller than I. In my congregation now, I almost never preach without wearing heels, sheerly to *feel* taller.

The prophet Micah told the tribe Bethlehem Ephrathah that though they were “small among the clans of Judah,” their tribe would be the family line of Israel’s redeeming ruler. Micah compared this coming leader to a lowly shepherd. He would come from unassuming origins but will care for the people unlike their present leadership. He would care for them as an attentive shepherd cares for his sheep.

Coming as the savior of the world, Jesus was born into this world as *a baby*. Jesus was born among the humble shepherds in Bethlehem and raised in Podunk Nazareth.

Once raised, the savior of the world would spend three years healing, teaching, and proclaiming in preparation for his death on a cross. The long-promised messiah was expected to come in military might. That he would die between two criminals was not what many had hoped.

Be it you or your congregation, we often compare the capability for power with sheer size and force. If something or someone is to have an impact, we think their own size, the girth of their budget or building, or the dominance

of their authority must be *large*. Yet, the Lord chose “the weak things of the world to shame the strong” (1 Corinthians 1:27).

This certainly was the case for Israel. Micah prophesied they would be sent into exile as punishment for their sinfulness. God would judge them but, as further work toward their redemption, would provide for them caring leadership, likened to a good shepherd (John 10:10). This good shepherd would come from one of the smallest clans in Judah.

Judgment and Hope

The New Testament states these words were God’s promises to send the Son (Matthew 2:6). Micah’s prophecy may have had two fulfillments: a leader closer to the time in which he is speaking and, eventually, Christ Jesus. Either way, Micah’s prophecy moved back and forth between messages of judgment and of hope. Such a rhetorical tactic had an effect: judgment and hope alike were certain realities.

Once here, what would this promised leader do? Not only would he lead the people like a good shepherd but would also lead Israel and Judah back to restoration. The called people of God would be brought back together and their places of living and worship restored.

This was an important hope for Israel and Judah. The Lord would restore these nations and they would stand strong against neighboring nations (5:7-9). As a small and often vulnerable nation, a message of empowerment such as this was full of hope. Zion would be restored and all those the Lord cast away into exile will be brought back to this great city of Yahweh worship.

Though judgment would come to Israel and Judah, they were still promised hope. Though they will know exile, they will also know restoration. There is coming a time when the one who rule over them will not lie about peace for his own prosperity as their current leaders do. There is coming a hopeful

time when good leadership will come and he “will be their peace” (Micah 5:5).

God Works in Human Weakness

The Lord can work in human weakness to bring hope where it seems lost. The point all along for sending Israel into exile was for the nation to know their waywardness. The point all along was that they would return to the Lord with hearts and actions of God.

Though the nation would feel weak, as we often do when we know where we have strayed, the Lord would bring them back and restore them. Judgment was sure, but so was a hopeful restoration. God would guide and redeem. The prodigal son returned home despondent and aware of sinfulness, and the father warmly welcomed him back (Luke 15:18-19).

Not only could God take a nation beaten and restore them, but God would show this great power even further by providing a leader from an unlikely place. What might seem strange or weak to human thinking may just what God uses for his purposes. What feels like a weakness is often what the Lord will use to make his power known (2 Corinthians 12:9).

If you are feeling small (height or otherwise!) or maybe your congregation is discouraged for any number of reasons, remember that it is not the size or force of something or someone that matters, but their posture before the Lord. Israel and Judah were sent into exile and brought out so that they would be those who would love God and neighbor. The point all along was *who* they were called to be.

When we come to the Lord with sincere hearts, we know that he can work through our weaknesses. Our weaknesses humbles us and bring us before the Lord in need. God’s power is gracious and meets our needs with redemptive hope.

Maddie Rarick is pastor of Meadow Oaks Baptist Church in Temple, Texas.