

Whose Goings Forth Have Been From Old

*“But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah,
Too little to be among the clans of Judah,
From you One will go forth from Me to be ruler in Israel.
His goings forth are from long ago,
From the days of eternity.”
— Micah 5:2*

The way that the text of the Bible sweeps along is always fascinating to observe. Micah was, of course, one of OT “minor” prophets, and here in chapter 5 takes up the topic of the coming of the Messiah, the Christ. Chapter 5 and verse 1 speaks, at first, of the fact that the coming Messiah will come as a purifying agent to Israel in God’s Name. Micah uses the terms “...shall lay siege against...”. Those are pretty serious terms to speak of. The idea of a “siege” in verse implies the idea that what the Messiah will bring forth is that which will definitely accomplish its’ goal, no matter what the amount of time needful to get the job done.

The OT has been abundantly clear in just what God’s goals with Israel really are.

1. He wants to convince them of their sinful rebellion
2. He wants them to learn humility and bow themselves before He and grace and mercy.
3. He wants to demonstrate that He is loving and move them to the experience of that love.
4. He wishes to bring them to the place where they are useful to His purposes and bring Him glory and testimony of His righteousness and patience.
5. Actually, there are a number of others as well, but this suffices for now.

To meet these goals God has been willing to extend Himself again and again and again. But Israel was incredibly resistant and continued in their rebellion, even through the time of our Lord and including His crucifixion. Micah describe the idea as “...laying siege” to Israel. It is a powerful picture for what Israel’s God is willing, and indeed, will do to accomplish His desire with His people.

Just as a note, we see the phrase “Now gather yourself in troops, O daughter of troops...”. The “daughter of troops” speaks of Israel as the offspring of their parents, their rebellious parents and those who had, generation after generation, complicated and worsened the burden of the sin of the nation (let alone led the individuals of those generation to reap the results and punishments of their own, individual sin. Some have suggested that the reference here is used by Micah to suggest that Israel is her own enemy. The entire reference to troops, they say, is metaphorical and designed to, as we said, cause Israel to gather herself together and defend herself against both that which is afflicting and attacking her now, as

well as to see that her current situation will draw the action and chastening of God, even to a grave extent. It might also be a reference to chastening hand of God and His allowing of Sennacherib to come and take the Northern Kingdom into captivity as a chastening for their sin.

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“But you...” Is a grammatical device that to signal a change of idea, using a conjunctive device to draw attention from the “he” of the first two verse, which, as we noted, is likely a reference to the invasion of Sennacherib and the captivity that Israel was undergoing (@701 b.c.). Even though it is clear here that Israel was unable to defend herself, in contrast, this device suggests a coming new Kingship, namely that of the Messiah, God’s King.

This coming great King, Micah says, will arise from Ephrathah, from the little town of Bethlehem. We need to note that this Bethlehem of Ephrathah (meaning “fruitful”) is used in combination like this to differentiate it from the Galilean town of the same name. Just in passing this Bethlehem (meaning “House of Bread”) was known for the many olive orchards and vineyards that surrounded the town. The town, though very small was well know and thought well of amongst the Jews of Micah’s (and Jesus) day. We should note, just in passing, that Bethlehem was the town of origin for Israel’s great King David, and that truth would not be missed from Micah’s mouth.

In the last two phrases we have a theological statement concerning just Who this Messiah is and what His nature is.

1. Israel’s Messiah has been active from eternity past and we (and Israel) must recognize this is a real and essential part of Who He is. He is the only “Eternal” one that exists. Even the holy angels (not to mention the unholy ones!) have not been “from eternity” or functioning from “long ago”.
2. This Messiah has always had an active part in the created world. He has “gone forth” implying that He had a purpose and something to go forth for.
3. Just to note that it seems that He is said to have been pursuing His purpose with Israel (and likely with other men) from eternity past.
4. Remembering that V1 spoke about this coming One being stricken “...with the rod on the cheek...” we are forced to conclude that this “stricken” is the reason why He is coming at all.
5. Just as an aside, V3 speaks of a separation between the first coming mentioned in V2 and what seems clearly to refer to a return of Messiah to His people.
6. If His goings forth have been “for long ago” it is reasonable to assume that this second coming is likewise “from long ago”.

So it seems that this is a manner of warning as well as exhortation, Micah gives both the sharp prophecy in words of the coming Messiah acting in a “Military” fashion, namely laying siege as an attacking nation would do to an enemy city.

The exhortation here is for Israel to literally gather themselves into troops as their parents had done. Rather, it is a very graphic warning for them to be aware of what God’s Messiah was going to do so that they could be moved from rebellion to faithful obedience. The intention is that any reader would do what every normal and faithful Jew would do. They would see what Micah had said, and their response or reaction would distress at the very idea of this coming. As a result of this, and believing that Micah would not preach falsehood (he was a Prophet of God, after all) and would not resort to manipulation. They would pause and think a bit and see that what Micah was saying about their past and their current nature is true and take warning, as Micah intended. It is Micah’s further desire that they respond in faith and trust in the grace of God.

The Lord Jesus had goings forth for his people as their representative before the throne, long before they appeared upon the stage of time. It was “from everlasting” that he signed the compact with his Father, that he would pay blood for blood, suffering for suffering, agony for agony, and death for death, in the behalf of his people; it was “from everlasting” that he gave himself up without a murmuring word. That from the crown of his head to the sole of his foot he might sweat great drops of blood, that he might be spit upon, pierced, mocked, rent asunder, and crushed beneath the pains of death. His goings forth as our Surety were from everlasting. Pause, my soul, and wonder! Thou hast goings forth in the person of Jesus “from everlasting.” Not only when thou wast born into the world did Christ love thee, but his delights were with the sons of men before there were any sons of men. Often did he think of them; from everlasting to everlasting he had set his affection upon them. What! my soul, has he been so long about thy salvation, and will not he accomplish it? Has he from everlasting been going forth to save me, and will he lose me now? What! Has he carried me in his hand, as his precious jewel, and will he now let me slip from between his fingers? Did he choose me before the mountains were brought forth, or the channels of the deep were digged, and will he reject me now? Impossible! I am sure he would not have loved me so long if he had not been a changeless Lover. If he could grow weary of me, he would have been tired of me long before now. If he had not loved me with a love as deep as hell, and as strong as death, he would have turned from me long ago. Oh, joy above all joys, to know that I am his everlasting and inalienable inheritance, given to him by his Father or ever the earth was! Everlasting love shall be the pillow for my head this night.