

# God's Ruler From Bethlehem Reigns For Us

Micah 5:2-5a • 2020-12-27 • Christmas 2



How do you pick a good leader? When children play games, it is usually the oldest who gets to pick the teams. And who do they pick as people for their team? It's always the next oldest, the next fastest, the next tallest. Even as we grow up, we pick leaders that seem to be the most qualified and influential, the winners. This morning we will be looking at the background qualifications to an entirely different ruler: God's appointed ruler. He is described for us in Micah 5. What does God tell us about the one he chooses to rule for us? God's ruler from Bethlehem reigns for us: on the basis of divine authority, bringing full security.

King Hezekiah ruled over the nation of Judah in Micah's time. He had great credentials. He was of the lineage of King David. He was the rightful ruler; born the son of a king. He had been trained to rule over the nation of Judah. And on top of all this Hezekiah trusted in the Lord, the God of Israel. In fact, he was even praised as such a godly king that the book of 2 Kings says, *"There was no one like him among all the kings of Judah, either before him or after him."* (2 Kings 18:5) If anyone was qualified to rule over God's people in Micah's time, it would have been Hezekiah.

But Hezekiah lost face. Sennacherib king of Assyria attacked all the fortified cities of Judah and captured them. How could Hezekiah protect his nation in the face of this evil? He was forced to pay tribute to the king of Assyria. Sadly, he even did this by taking away from God's temple, *"Hezekiah gave him all the silver that was found in the temple of the Lord and in the treasuries of the royal palace. Hezekiah king of Judah stripped off the gold with which he had covered the doors and doorposts of the temple of the Lord, and gave it to the king of Assyria."* (2 Ki 18:15-16).

In the end, his effort to pay off the enemy didn't work. Instead, the Assyrian's pressed their attack and laid siege to the city of Jerusalem. The Assyrian King came to rub it in Hezekiah's face. His spokesperson taunted the people at the gate, *"How can you say the Lord will deliver you?"* It was as if Hezekiah had received a blow to the face and was left to sit there in disgrace. If securing peace were left to him things would have gotten ugly fast.

The closest I can think our nation has had to someone like Hezekiah that was more than qualified to lead was our first president, Washington. Americans looked up to him as the victor over Great Britain. They relied on him to rule the new nation and keep it safe from future attack. On the basis of his background and his qualifications he was immediately looked to as a leader for the nation. That's just how we pick leaders. People want to be on the winning side. High school clubs will pick as their leader someone who is popular and talented. The captain of the cheerleaders is often the most talented and experienced. First-chair positions in a band go to the most qualified and experienced instrumentalist. You won't be promoted to be a manager or CEO at work if you're not climbing the right ladder to leadership. We know why we pick people as leaders and rulers: they are the strongest and most influential people.

Hezekiah had a great track record of winning victories. But the people were discovering not even the best leader can provide perfect security. That is always the case, no matter how great the leader. Less than thirty years after President Washington an American president failed to keep the nation secure. The White House was in ashes from the invading British military –and the president had to run for his own life. And the cheerleader captain will soon let you fall. The band leader will miss a cue when it matters most. The people we look to as leaders --no matter what their qualifications -- will at some point fail. Even the king of Israel could not carry out his role as appointed ruler. Hezekiah could only watch as city after city was taken by the King of Assyria. What did he offer the people? Only his best! And he was a faithful ruler! But what they got was fear, insecurity, and no peace in the land.

There is not much worse than having the carpet of security ripped out from under your feet. Even the smallest loss of security can make life quite uncomfortable. One day I was walking in what ought to be a secure place, my home. Suddenly I felt a sharp object pierce through the bottom of my foot, like a tiny knife. Apparently, I had stepped on a needle. You can imagine how secure I then felt in my own home after that. Where was the needle? Were there more? I couldn't find it; I just knew it was in a blanket that my family received a long while back. Just like that my sense of security had been lost. We all know it only takes one small failure to lose our security in this world --one slip up or failure by those who we trust to rule and protect, to lead and guide. Sin is like that needle, robbing us of peace.

And doesn't take much from sin's curse to ruin our sense of security. To whom did those in the towers in New York look to for safe airspace? There is no perfect air control force. To whom do the people of the world turn when a virus robs them of security? To whom do we turn when natural disasters overwhelm entire cities? It only takes one failure to make us realize how much peril there is for us all. Our own sin and the sins of this world leave us trembling under a curse and under fear of death. We need someone to bring peace!

Of course, like Hezekiah, we know who our King is. We know who reigns eternal. But we can sometimes be so focused on getting superficial security and happiness in this life that we can begin to lose sight the one ruler who matters. When our efforts to pay off and stave off evil fail, then what? We ask, "God where is peace? Where is prosperity? Who can I look to for happiness and joy?"

Micah directs us where to look. God's appointed ruler stands utterly unique in his qualifications and his work. He is the one prophesied to be born in Bethlehem! Micah prophesied: *"But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel."*

An inhabitant of Judah would read such a phrase and wonder. Bethlehem was hardly an influential town. Governors are supposed to be from Phoenix, not Rye or Gisela! But it would not be on the bases of perceived worldly might or influence that God's ruler would be found. Prophecy revealed his lowly origin. Prophecy revealed he would do great things. King David was born there, the promised King from David's line would also be born there. David had been from a lowly origin and raised to great heights, how much more the son of David would be lowly in origin but be great! Bethlehem is the place from where Jesus of Nazareth hailed. Joseph and Mary went to Bethlehem. God's chosen ruler would be born of a woman in the town of Bethlehem.

But this ruler would be no usurper. *"His goings forth are from the beginning, from the days of eternity."* He reigned long before any king reigned over Israel. In fact, he was ruler before the nation of Israel even existed. People challenged Jesus' authority saying, "You're not even fifty years old!" He responded, "before Abraham was born, I am!" He is the one who spoke to Abraham. He is the one who spoke from eternity and by his command created the world. Though the world only saw Jesus of Nazareth born in a manger, he is the true Son of God. He is the most qualified ruler this world has ever seen.

The most qualified ruler would accomplish what none other ever could. *"He will stand and shepherd with the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God."* Jesus will not ever have to stand by while his kingdom crumbles. He will never have to pay tribute to any King or ruler. He will protect his flock in the strength of the Lord! Not even the gates of hell can overcome his reign.

How could such a ruler have such power? After all, when Jesus set aside his glory and might to be born into this world, he didn't look so mighty. When the soldier grabbed him and crucified the King of the Jews, he didn't look like a triumphant king of the line of David. But God doesn't appoint his ruler on the basis of what this world perceives. And this ruler would not carry out his work on the basis of what the world perceived. Jesus, God's Son, came to carry out the promise of a ruler who would come and take on humble origins. It was God's plan that Jesus be born into this world with a humble birth. When he came as king, he set aside his eternal glory and veiled it. He came to live as a man born in Bethlehem, to carry out his work as planned.

God's plan included having Jesus displayed before the world on the cross. It seemed as if Satan had struck Jesus on the face and he was left there hanging on the cross in disgrace as his disciples abandoned him. Micah prophesied, *"They will strike Israel's ruler on the cheek."* (Micah 5:1) He was surrounded by his enemies and his flock was scattered. But it was at this very moment in time when God's appointed ruler crushed the enemy. Facing the wages of sin that we deserved he conquered sin and removed it. Facing the taunts of his enemies he triumphed over even Satan on the cross. Even facing an agonizing death, he conquered death itself on the cross! He didn't pay off evil with the gold from the temple doors. He paid the price of our sin and took its curse with the price of his own blood. After declaring his work completed, he let out a cry and breathed his last breath.

Yet not even death would stop him. He rose to life victorious. And this assures us that even when pain and death threaten our security in his kingdom, Jesus' pronouncement against death remains: *"Behold, I make all things new."* *"...at that time he will be great to the ends of the earth."* And we *"will live securely."* The nation of Israel felt insecure as the Assyrians trampled their cities. As assurance God crushed the Assyrian army for them. Hezekiah was saved by the hand of the Lord. We are saved by his hand. Under the reign of Jesus, we look forward to living with uninterrupted enjoyment of peace. There will never again be any disappointment or lack of security. Our peace will be complete and unending. And just as the angels in heaven declared, *"Glory to God in the highest!"* at his birth, at his second coming all will shout *"Salvation belongs to our God! To him be all glory and honor and authority and power!"* And Jesus Christ will forever *"be our peace!"*

That greatness is still reaching around the ends of the earth today. All around the world with you the holy Christian church acclaim Jesus as Lord and King. He will gather back his scattered flock. Micah points out that upon the birth of this ruler, *"the rest of his brothers will return to join the Israelites."* All Israel includes all those who believe in Jesus Christ as God's Son our Savior. He gathers his flock under his care and shepherds them safely until they are in his eternal kingdom of peace.

There are a lot of places we can turn to try to find security and peace. Leaders, governments, financial accounts, and other places. We look to many sources of security and many leaders. But there is only one ruler who brings us real security and lasting peace. This is just the ruler we need! His authority is divine and exceeds all earthly standards. His reign brings full security and peace! God's ruler from Bethlehem reigns for us 1) on the basis of divine authority 2) bringing full security. That is why we sing: *Come to Bethlehem and see Him whose birth the angels sing; Come, adore on bended knee Christ the Lord, the new-born King!*