

Bethlehem: Tiny Town

(Micah 5:2)

Intro: You've heard of a one-horse town, but what about a one-person town? The town of Lost Springs with a population of 1 is just such a town. The tiny town of Lost Springs is located on the High Plains of Wyoming, and is just one of a dozen towns scattered throughout the U.S. with populations you can count on one hand—and sometimes one finger. Another is Tortilla Flats, Arizona with a population of 6.

There were some tiny towns in Israel too. One of the tiniest towns in ancient Israel was Bethlehem. The prophet Micah, in Micah 5, verse 2, described it as “Too little to be among the thousands of Judah” (Micah 5:2). The “thousands of Judah” Micah references here refers to the practice in ancient Israel of dividing the various tribes up into fighting units of one thousand. If a town was too small to be numbered, it would be placed with another clan in order to provide enough warriors to be numbered as one among the thousand.

What Micah was saying here was that Bethlehem was a town that was too small to be numbered among the clans of Judah. Bethlehem was so tiny that it wasn't even listed among Joshua's census of the tribes in Judah (Josh. 15). If you were to read the list of towns and cities in Judah recorded in Joshua 15 you will discover the names of over a hundred towns and cities, and yet the tiny town of Bethlehem is not mentioned.

Now, here is what makes Micah's prophecy so amazing. Even though Bethlehem was so small that it wasn't even numbered among the clans of Judah, yet it was from here that God was going to bring forth the Messiah to be Ruler in Israel. This is referring to God's eternal Son, the Lord, Jesus Christ.

Background on Bethlehem:

The town of Bethlehem is located about 5 miles south of Jerusalem. Like Nazareth, it was situated on a terraced hillside, and sat at an elevation of 2,500 feet above sea level. It was situated on the main road leading south from Jerusalem to Hebron and on to Egypt. In its earlier days it was not called Bethlehem but Ephrath, which means *fruitful* (Gen. 35:19). Another derivation of Ephrath that was used later was Ephratah (Ruth 4:11 and Micah 5:2). The name of the town was later changed from Ephrath or Ephratah to Bethlehem. The name Bethlehem has a very similar

meaning to Ephrath or Ephrata, it means “*the House of Bread.*” While Bethlehem may have been nothing more than a tiny little town, it was none-the-less a place of plenty. Bethlehem is surrounded by fertile fields, fig and olive orchards, and vineyards. It was and still is a house of bread and plenty.

Now, Bethlehem is mentioned nearly forty times in the Scripture. This tiny town is famous for at least three reasons. First, Ruth met and married Boaz here, it was the the ancestral home of King David (1 Sam. 16–17), and the birthplace of our Savior, Jesus Christ (Micah 5:2; Luke 2:1-20). Look with me this morning at these three personages who made Bethlehem famous. Ruth, David, and our Savior Jesus Christ. Let’s begin with the love story of Ruth and Boaz in the Book of Ruth. Turn with me in your Bible to Ruth chapter 1.

I. The Love Story Of Ruth And Boaz

A. The family of Elimelech (1:1-5)

Ruth 1, verse 1—Now it came about in the days when the judges governed, that there was a famine in the land. And a certain man of Bethlehem in Judah went to sojourn in the land of Moab with his wife and his two sons. **2** And the name of the man was Elimelech, and the name of his wife, Naomi; and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Chilion, Ephrathites of Bethlehem in Judah. Now they entered the land of Moab and remained there.

During the days of the Judges, there was a certain man of Bethlehem of Judah named Elimelech, who because of a famine went to live temporarily in the land of Moab. Notice that the inhabitants of Bethlehem are called Ephrathites after their ancient tribal name. This family lived in Bethlehem, the house of bread, but unfortunately a famine came against the land. God brought the famine to discipline His people for their sin. Elimelech, whose name means “God is my King,” was living as if God was not his King. He represents the people of Israel and Judah, who were living to please themselves. There is no indication in our story that Elimelech ever consulted God about moving his family to Moab. He just heads for the pagan country of Moab and remains there (v. 2).

As the story progresses it becomes apparent that Elimelech was out of the will of God. The first thing that happens is Elimelech, Naomi’s husband died (v. 3). Then her sons, Mahlon (puny) and Chilion (pining or sickly), took for themselves pagan Moabite women as wives and then they both also died. Poor Naomi, whose name means pleasant or lovely, was left alone, bereft of her husband and her two sons, in a strange land with two pagan daughters-in-law.

B. Ruth's faithfulness to Naomi (1:6-18)

We next read of Naomi's decision to return home to Bethlehem, vv. 6-7

Then she, Naomi, arose with her daughters-in-law that she might return from the land of Moab, for she had heard in the land of Moab that the LORD had visited His people in giving them food. **7** So she departed from the place where she was, and her two daughters-in-law with her; and they went on the way to return to the land of Judah.

News came to Naomi in Moab that God had once again provided bread in Bethlehem. The fruitful hillsides of ancient Ephratah were once again flourishing with bread for God's people. As the story progresses, one of Naomi's daughter-in-laws, Orpha, is persuaded to return home to her father's house. But Ruth refused to leave Naomi, and made her famous proclamation in verses **16-17** Ruth said, "Do not urge me to leave you or turn back from following you; for where you go, I will go, and where you lodge, I will lodge. "Your people shall be my people, and your God, my God. **17** "Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. "Thus may the LORD do to me, and worse, if anything but death parts you and me."

While Orpha returned home to her pagan gods in Moab, Ruth confessed her faith in the God of Israel. Ruth had become a believer in the One True God. We read in **verse 22** So Naomi returned, and with her Ruth the Moabitess, her daughter-in-law, who returned from the land of Moab. Naomi had returned home to the House of Bread, and God is going to provide bread for her and Ruth in a most miraculous way. In fact, we read in **verse 22** "That they came to Bethlehem at the beginning of barley harvest."

As many of you know, the LORD led Ruth to glean in the fields of Boaz, a very gracious and godly man. Boaz permitted Ruth to glean among his maidens, all the days of the barley harvest, and the wheat harvest that followed (2:23). God provided for all of Naomi and Ruth's needs through Boaz, who just happened to be Naomi's kinsman redeemer. Boaz falls in love with Ruth, and according to the law of the Kinsman Redeemer, he redeemed Elimelech's property, Naomi, and Ruth, in order to raise up an heir to Elimelech, who had died.

Bethlehem may only have been a tiny town in Judah, but its very existence is a powerful reminder that there is God above who sees our needs, cares about our needs, and takes care of our needs. The story of God's provision for Naomi

and Ruth reminds me of Paul's promise to the Philippians in Philippians 4:19 "And my God *shall supply all your needs* according to His riches in glory **in Christ Jesus.**" The same God who met Naomi and Ruth's needs is available to meet your needs this Christmas. O dear friend, if you are visiting with us this morning, hear what God is saying to you. He will provide all your needs if you will trust in Him to do it. Notice that God's provision is only available to those who are in Christ Jesus. This refers to **believers in Christ!** If you are here this morning and have never trusted in Jesus Christ as your Savior, won't you do it this Christmas morning. Trust in Jesus as your Savior, and He will cleanse you of all your sin, and He will begin providing for all your needs.

The conclusion of Naomi and Ruth's story actually links us to the next major personage whose life revolves around Bethlehem. It also informs us why God put this little Book of Ruth in the Bible. The major reason God put this marvelous little love story about Ruth and Boaz in the Bible was to reveal to us the line through which the Messiah would come. This is the primary purpose of this little book.

We read in **Ruth chapter 4, verse 13** that Boaz took Ruth to be his wife, and the LORD enabled her to conceive, and she gave birth to a son. Drop down to the end of **verse 17**—And the neighbor women gave him a name, saying, "A son was born to Naomi!" And they named him Obed. He is the father of Jesse, the father of David. It was through Boaz's line that the Savior of the world would be born in Bethlehem. Not only did God provide bread for Naomi and Ruth, the nation of Israel is going to get a king, a man after God's own heart.

God wants us to know that Ruth's son Obed is Elimelech's heir, the grandfather of King David. Here we have it, Ruth's grandson is King David. This leads us to the second great personage connected to Bethlehem, King David.

The prophet Micah predicted that the tiny town of Bethlehem would be the birthplace of the Messiah (Micah 5:2), a prophecy quoted by Matthew in chapter 2, verse 6 of his Gospel. Jesus was born in the city of David, Bethlehem. Don't miss the impact of these words! Jesus Christ, who is the Bread of Life, was cradled in a tiny town whose name means "House of Bread."

II. The City Of David (1 Samuel)

A. Saul is appointed as Israel's first king (1 Sam. 8–13)

Most of you here this morning are familiar with King David's story. We read in 1 Samuel 8:5 that the people of Israel demanded Samuel to appoint a king to judge over them like all the other nations. Even though Samuel was distressed over the people's choice, the LORD directed him to appoint Saul to be king over His people Israel (1 Sam. 10:24). Saul was a capable leader, and even though he was filled with the Spirit of God (1 Sam. 10:10), he repeatedly refused to obey God's commands. Saul was a very prideful and self-willed man. God eventually sent Samuel to pronounce judgment on Saul. Samuel told Saul in **1 Samuel 13:13-14** that God had rejected him as king, and that the LORD had sought out a man after His own heart. **That man was David.**

B. Saul is replaced by David the Bethlehemite (1 Sam. 16)

We read in **1 Samuel 16, verse 1**, Samuel mourned over God's rejection of Saul from being king over Israel. The LORD told Samuel to quit grieving and arise and fill his horn with oil and go to Jesse the Bethlehemite, for I have selected a king for Myself from among his sons."

Samuel travels to Bethlehem to anoint one of Jesse's sons to be the next king of Israel. When Samuel entered the feast prepared in his honor, he looked at Eliab, Jesse's oldest son and thought to himself, surely this is the LORD's anointed (1 Sam. 16:6). Samuel was basing his hunch on Eliab's appearance. **But the LORD said to Samuel in v. 7**—"Do not look at his appearance or at the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart."

Man tends to judge on outward appearance, but God looks at the heart. We read in **verse 10** Jesse made all seven of his sons pass before Samuel, but none of them was the one the LORD had chosen. Samuel asks Jesse are these all of your sons? Jesse says **in verse 11**, "Well, there remains yet one more David, the youngest. He is tending the sheep. Samuel said send for him. **v. 12**—When David came in the LORD said to Samuel, "Arise, anoint him, for this is he." David, the young shepherd boy, was called and anointed by God to shepherd His people Israel. Samuel took the oil and anointed David, and the Spirit of the LORD came upon David from that day onward.

David proves to be a man of God as he patiently waits for God to remove Saul, and to put him on the throne. The main thing I want you to see here, is that when God wanted a man after His own heart to rule as king in Israel, He went

to the tiny town of Bethlehem. He called an unknown shepherd boy from the House of Bread, to be the shepherd over His people Israel. David was chosen because his heart was right with God, he would obey the LORD and do all His will. I find it interesting that Elimelech, whose name meant “God is my King,” did not allow God to be his King at all. But young David had apparently already learned the importance of making **God his King**. Bethlehem was David’s town. The tiny town of Bethlehem became known as the city of David.

This leads us to the third great Personage connected to the town of Bethlehem, David’s most eminent descendant, Jesus Christ, the Messiah.

III. The Birthplace Of Jesus (Micah 5:2; Matt. 2:5)

Roughly 300 years after David, the prophet Micah made an amazing prophetic prediction concerning Bethlehem. Turn with me in your Bibles to the Minor prophet Micah. Micah chapter 5, verse 2

“ But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah,
 Too little to be among the clans of Judah,
 From you One will go forth for Me to be Ruler in Israel.
 His goings forth are from long ago,
 Even from the days of eternity.”

This is perhaps one of the most amazing prophecies in the entire Old Testament. Consider what Micah was saying, God was going to cause someone to be born in the tiny town of Bethlehem to be Ruler in Israel. His goings forth or origin was from of old, “from long ago”; by the way, these words “from long ago” are used in the Book of Habakkuk to describe **God’s eternal nature**. To help convey his point, Micah adds the words, “Even from the days of eternity.”

The fact this One’s goings forth are from of old, even from the days of eternity, affirms the eternal existence of this One who would be born in Bethlehem. Do you understand what Micah was predicting? There was going to be a miraculous birth in the tiny town of Bethlehem. A baby was going to be born who had existed from all eternity past. Since the only eternal Being is God, Micah was referring to the miraculous virgin-birth predicted by his contemporary Isaiah, in Isaiah 7:14. This prediction actually fulfilled a promise that God had made to David in the early days of his reign as king. God had promised David in **1 Samuel 7:12-14** that **his house, his throne, and his kingdom** would be established forever. The only way this promise could be fulfilled was for God to

send forth David's eternal virgin-born Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. **This my friends is the Christmas story**—God sent forth His eternal Son to become a man, the God-man born into the human race into David's family. The eternal Son of God, descendant of David has come to perpetuate David's royal line forever. We become part of God's family through Spiritual rebirth (John 3:16).

Not only would Messiah be born to David's family in fulfillment of 1 Samuel 7:14, we also learn here in Micah 5:2 that the Messiah was going to be born in David's city, Bethlehem Ephrathah.

The Jews understood Micah's prophecy to be predicting the place of Messiah's birth. They had no doubt about it. You will recall that when the Magi—the Wise Men—came from Parthia to Jerusalem in search of Israel's new-born King, King Herod assembled the chief priest and scribes and asked them “Where is the Messiah to be born?” They answered in **Matthew 2:5-6**—

5 “ In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it has been written by the prophet Micah 5:2,

6 ‘AND YOU, BETHLEHEM, LAND OF JUDAH,
ARE BY NO MEANS LEAST AMONG THE LEADERS OF JUDAH;
FOR OUT OF YOU SHALL COME FORTH A RULER,
WHO WILL SHEPHERD MY PEOPLE ISRAEL.’”

The chief priest and scribes of Israel all knew, according to Micah 5:2, that the Messiah was going to be born in Bethlehem. So, Herod sent the Magi off to Bethlehem. The Magi came to Bethlehem, and worshiped Christ the new-born King.

Permit me to close by reading *the Christmas Story recorded in Luke 2:1-20*

1 Now it came about in those days that a decree went out from Caesar Augustus, that a census be taken of all the inhabited earth. 2 This was the first census taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. 3 And all were proceeding to register for the census, everyone to his own city. 4 And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the city of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family of David, 5 in order to register, along with Mary, who was engaged to him, and was with child. 6 And it came about that while they were there, the days were completed for her to give birth. 7 And she gave birth to her first-born son; and she wrapped Him in swaddling cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

Luke 2:8 And in the same region there were some shepherds staying out in the fields, and keeping watch over their flock by night. **9** And an angel of the Lord suddenly stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them; and they were terribly frightened. **10** And the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy which shall be for all the people; **11** for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. **12** “And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths, and lying in a manger.” **13** And suddenly there appeared with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, **14** “Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased.”

15 And it came about when the angels had gone away from them into heaven, that the shepherds began saying to one another, “Let us go straight to Bethlehem then, and see this thing that has happened which the Lord has made known to us.” **16** And they came in haste and found their way to Mary and Joseph, and the baby as He lay in the manger. **17** And when they had seen this, they made known the statement which had been told them about this Child. **18** And all who heard it wondered at the things which were told them by the shepherds. **19** But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. **20** And the shepherds went back, glorifying and praising God for all that they had heard and seen, just as had been told them.

Conclusion:

Christmas is about God’s gracious provision of His eternal Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, who was born of a virgin in the ancient city of David, Bethlehem. God’s eternal Son poured Himself into human flesh so He could die for the sins of the world, and provide salvation for any and all who would believe in and receive Him as Savior. If you are here this morning and have never accepted Jesus Christ as your Savior from sin and death, would you consider surrendering your life to Him as I close in prayer? Permit the virgin-born Son of God, the son of David, from the tiny town of Bethlehem, to become your Savior this morning. **John 3:16**

If you are a believer here this morning and you would admit that your Christian life has been devoid of Spiritual vitality lately, would you invite Jesus to renew your heart today? **Let us all celebrate the true Wonder of Christmas!**

Let’s pray