

# OpenTheo

## September 7th: Micah 5 & Matthew 8:1-17

September 6, 2021



### Alastair Roberts

The Davidic king coming forth from Bethlehem. A series of miracles and healings.

My reflections are searchable by Bible chapter here:

<https://audio.alastairadversaria.com/explore/>.

If you are interested in supporting this project, please consider supporting my work on Patreon (<https://www.patreon.com/zugzwanged>), using my PayPal account (<https://bit.ly/2RLaUcB>), or buying books for my research on Amazon ([https://www.amazon.co.uk/hz/wishlist/ls/36WVSWCK4X33O?ref\\_=wl\\_share](https://www.amazon.co.uk/hz/wishlist/ls/36WVSWCK4X33O?ref_=wl_share)).

You can also listen to the audio of these episodes on iTunes:

<https://itunes.apple.com/gb/podcast/alastairs-adversaria/id1416351035?mt=2>.

## Transcript

Micah chapter 5. I will cut off your horses from among you, and will destroy your chariots. And I will cut off the cities of your land, and throw down all your strongholds. And I will cut off sorceries from your hand, and you shall have no more tellers of fortunes.

And I will cut off your carved images, and your pillars from among you, and you shall bow down no more to the work of your hands. And I will root out your Asherah images from among you, and destroy your cities. And in anger and wrath I will execute vengeance on the nations that did not obey.

In treating the end of Micah chapter 4, we notice the character of Rachel, present just beneath the surface of the text. The text mentioned a particular location, Migdal-Eder, or the Tower of the Flock, and then proceeded to talk about a woman struggling in birth. All of this could be seen as a subtle allusion to the story of Rachel, back in Genesis chapter 35, while Rachel was still pregnant with Benjamin.

The Lord had promised Jacob that kings would come from his own body. In verses 16-21

of that chapter we read what happened next. Then they journeyed from Bethel.

When they were some distance from Ephrath, Rachel went into labour, and she had hard labour. And when her labour was at its hardest, the midwives said to her, Do not fear, for you have another son. And as her soul was departing, for she was dying, she called his name Ben-Oni.

But his father called him Benjamin. So Rachel died, and she was buried on the way to Ephrath, that is Bethlehem. And Jacob set up a pillar over her tomb.

It is the pillar of Rachel's tomb, which is there to this day. Israel journeyed on and pitched his tent beyond the Tower of Edah. As we read on into chapter 5, allusions to Rachel continue.

The nation, being compared to its great matriarch, Rachel, is struggling in its pangs, facing the invading Assyrians, for instance. The great awaited royal leader of the people, who would be the full fulfilment of the promise made to Jacob back in Genesis chapter 35, has not yet arrived. Yet in these reminders of the tragic story of Rachel, Migdal-Eda, Bethlehem, Ephrath, the woman struggling in birth, and the threat of death, we discover a new promise that is brewing.

The birth of a new child, a one who will rule his people. The chapter however begins with a reminder of how low the line of David has been brought. The son of David is supposed to rule the nations with a rod of iron, yet the nations are striking him on the cheek.

He is being surrounded and besieged by the Assyrians and their tributaries. Presumably we should see the events of 701 BC at the background here, with the invasion of Sennacherib. Bethlehem of course was the town from which David hailed.

From the place that David first came, an heir of David would arise. Bethlehem as a town promised little. It was not a great town.

It was not a place that could muster a great quantity of troops. Yet Bethlehem would be the place from which the great ruler of the people would arise. Just as in various places in the book of Isaiah, for instance, we see here the line of David that has been nearly cut off, and then as it seems to have been removed from the place where David first came, his greatest son would come forth, springing up like a root out of dry ground, as Isaiah chapter 53 puts it.

Rachel had struggled and failed to reach Bethlehem and had died on the way. Yet now the woman who was struggling to give birth would reach Bethlehem, and in that town of Bethlehem, the great child that has been awaited would be born. In the Christian tradition, the end of verse 2 has commonly been taken as a reference to Christ's eternal origins.

The text certainly does not need to be read this way, and we should beware, it seems to me, of trying to press it into that theological mould. Nevertheless, there is something of a mythic quality about this statement that might suggest something akin to deep magic from the dawn of time. There is here displayed something of the deeper mystery of God's purpose from the very beginning.

The return to Bethlehem, the place of David's birth and the origin of the dynasty, takes us back behind the current Davidic king on the throne to the very root of Jesse in Bethlehem beneath him. It will be from Bethlehem, not Jerusalem, that the awaited one, who was always the destiny of the Davidic line, would come forth. This awaited son of David, like his forefather, would be a shepherd of the people.

Acting with the strength and the authority of the Lord as his son, he would execute justice in the land and deliver his people. He would be the means of redemption for his brothers who would return to the land from exile. Behind this great prophecy we should also hear the words of the Davidic covenant in 2 Samuel chapter 7 verses 12 to 16.

In addition to restoring the people as the great shepherd and giving them security, his glory would also go out to the surrounding lands and even to the ends of the earth. He would be the source of their peace, the prince of peace, as Isaiah speaks about. As he establishes his rule, the nation will find security and strength against its enemies on all sides.

The Assyrians, being the current great threat to the nation, are set forth as paradigmatic examples here. Verses 7 and 8 are clearly paralleled. In the first, the remnant of Jacob are compared to Jew and showers on the grass, and in the second to lions among the peoples.

The clear literary paralleling of these two verses invites us to see not just the similarities but the contrasts. The first one is one that explores an image of blessing, the Jew which revives the grass and the land, saving it from the parching heat of the sun. Jacob is here presented as a blessing for the nations, a means by which they will be revived and given health, all we should recognize in fulfillment of the Abrahamic promise.

The second image, however, is an image of Jacob as an agent of divine justice. Jacob here is seen not just as a means of giving health to the nations, but as a threat to any that will resist the power of the Lord. This purpose of the Lord for them should, in the present, give the people a confidence over their adversaries.

They should act with confidence, knowing that the time would come when all of their opponents would be cut off. Leslie Allen notes the presence of a hook and line device here that connects verse 9 and verse 10. Verse 9 speaks about being cut off and the new oracle that begins in verse 10 also plays upon that word for being cut off.

Now it is not the enemies that are being cut off but the unfaithful of the people. The context again seems to be the events of 701 BC and the invasion of Sennacherib and the Assyrian forces. As we see in 2 Kings chapter 18 verse 24, Judah had looked to Egypt for military aid, specifically depending upon Egypt for horses and chariots.

This war machine gave Judah a sense of its security. Likewise, Judah also felt confidence in the great fortified cities of the land. However, when the Assyrians came to the land, the fortified cities would be breached and the great war machine that Hezekiah had built up would be of little avail against them.

They had clearly forgotten the lesson of Psalm 20 verses 7 to 8. Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the Lord our God. They collapse and fall, but we rise and stand upright. Judah's strength never ultimately rested in the might of its war machine but in the power of its God.

And on the other side, when it trusted in its war machine and failed to trust in God, the war machine would prove absolutely useless when the Lord Himself turned against the people. Besides the false trust that the nation put in its military might and its strong defences, it also trusted in sorcery, divination and idolatry. Just as Israel had been instructed not to go back to Egypt for horses and chariots, they were not supposed to worship false gods or engage in any of these occult practices.

And the Lord would strip them of all of these things, not least because they are futile, they are bowing down to the work of their hands. Here we see a reminder of the common prophetic polemic against pagan idolatry. As the Lord stripped His people of all of those things in which they falsely placed their trust, instead of placing their trust in Him, He was graciously removing things that were preventing them from turning back to Himself.

Judgment would begin with the house of God. But the chapter ends with a broader declaration of divine vengeance that should be expected by those disobedient nations that did not obey the word of the Lord and gave themselves to idols. A question to consider, how do we see the prophecies of this chapter used within the New Testament? Matthew 8 verses 1-17 When He came down from the mountain, great crowds followed Him.

And, behold, a leper came to Him and knelt before Him, saying, Lord, if You will, You can make me clean. And Jesus stretched out His hand and touched Him, saying, I will, be clean. And immediately His leprosy was cleansed.

And Jesus said to him, See that you say nothing to anyone, but go, show yourself to the priest and offer the gift that Moses commanded, for a proof to them. When He had entered Capernaum, a centurion came forward to Him, appealing to Him, Lord, my servant is lying paralyzed at home, suffering terribly. And He said to him, I will come and

heal him.

The centurion replied, Lord, I am not worthy to have You come under my roof, but only say the word and my servant will be healed. For I too am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. And I say to one, go, and he goes, and to another, come, and he comes, and to my servant, do this, and he does it.

When Jesus heard this, He marveled and said to those who followed Him, Truly I tell you, with no one in Israel have I found such faith. I tell you, many will come from east and west and recline at table with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, while the sons of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

And to the centurion Jesus said, Go, let it be done for you as you have believed. And the servant was healed at that very moment. And when Jesus entered Peter's house, He saw his mother-in-law lying sick with a fever.

He touched her hand, and the fever left her, and she rose and began to serve Him. That evening they brought to Him many who were oppressed by demons, and He cast out the spirits with a word, and healed all who were sick. This was to fulfil what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah, He took our illnesses and bore our diseases.

Matthew 8 begins with Jesus descending the mountain. This descent from the mountain bookends the entire sermon on the mount. It began with Jesus ascending the mountain and now He descends.

And perhaps it's also important for framing what happens next. It begins a series of ten actions in chapters 8 and 9, cleansing a leper, healing the centurion's servant, healing the fever of Peter's mother-in-law, calming the storm, casting out two demons, healing a paralytic, raising the dead girl of a ruler, healing a woman with the issue of blood, giving two blind men sight, and casting out a demon from a dumb man. Peter Lighthouse has suggested that there is a rhythm to the stories, with three sections, each containing explanations of Jesus' ministry, punctuated by reflections on or calls to discipleship.

We can see those calls to discipleship in verses 18 to 22 of chapter 8, verses 9 to 13 of chapter 9, and verses 35 of chapter 9 to 42 of chapter 10. And as we go through this series of events there's also a movement towards greater opposition. These are signs of the new life of the kingdom.

Outsiders and those excluded are coming into the kingdom. Lepers, gentiles, demon-possessed people, the woman with the issue of blood. Jesus is overcoming death and disease, these causes of exclusion from fellowship, and as he heals these people he is bringing them into fellowship once more.

He's bringing people who would have been outsiders into the enjoyment of the benefits

of the kingdom, gentiles in that case, and restoring faculties to those who lack them. These are all things that are spoken of in the Old Testament prophecies of the kingdom. This series of events begins with the healing of the leper, and the fact that Jesus touches the leper is a matter of importance.

We can think also of the presence of touch in the healing of the woman with the issue of blood. This is probably not what we think of as leprosy, it's a different sort of skin ailment. It is however something that would have excluded the sufferer from the enjoyment of full fellowship with the rest of the people of Israel.

And so healing a person from this condition would allow them to once more enter the fellowship and community of Israel. Jesus touches this man but he does not contract defilement, rather he communicates health and life. This is a reversal of the usual direction of movement, where usually if you touch a leper or someone who is unclean, you would become unclean.

Jesus does not become unclean, rather he communicates life, a life that is stronger than defilement. And this is a secret sign, it's one that the leper is not supposed to spread the word concerning. Rather it's like the turning of the water into wine.

There's only a few people who know about this, and the people who know it is a sign to them. For everyone else they don't recognise what's taking place. The next healing is the healing of the paralysed servant of the centurion.

And the centurion is possibly the highest military officer in Jesus's base town of Capernaum. He's an important figure, he has power and influence and authority. And Jesus is asked to perform a healing from a distance, a healing that will demonstrate the authority of his word.

This isn't magic tricks, this isn't something that can be done using sleight of hand. Jesus is healing from a great distance. It's similar to Jesus's second sign in the book of John, in chapter 4, where Jesus heals the official's son.

Once again he's demonstrating his authority at a distance. And the centurion recognises this. Jesus is someone who has authority like he does.

He can say go and someone goes, he can say come and they come. In the same way Christ can speak with authority into the world. And the nature of his authority is that of the authorised servant.

It's the authority of his word that he can use to heal the servant of the centurion. And once again this is a sign of the future of the kingdom. A sign of bringing in someone who is an outsider, of blessing someone who's a gentile, not a Jew.

Verse 7 is translated here as I will come and heal him. But it could also be read as a

question. You want me to come and heal him? A challenge to the faith of the centurion.

To which he responds with a recognition that he's not worthy for Christ to come into his house, but Christ's word alone is enough to perform the great act. And Christ's discussion of the faith of the centurion would seem to give weight to this particular reading. He declares that the faith of the centurion exceeds that which he has encountered in Israel itself.

Indeed people like the centurion will find their way into the messianic feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. And yet those who would seem to be the heirs will find themselves cast out into outer darkness with wailing and gnashing of teeth. This speaks of the later gentile mission for instance.

Numerous sons of the kingdom finding themselves outside and the people who would not seem to be the true sons finding themselves within. The faith of the centurion is seen in this practical request for healing. A recognition in the power of Christ's word that he is one with authority and on the basis of that Christ can declare that he is one who is of the type that belongs to the kingdom.

He's not just going to enjoy the crumbs, he is going to recline at the table. The third act in this chapter is the healing of Peter's mother-in-law. Peter's house and Capernaum may have been the base from which the disciples were working at this time.

Once again Jesus proves his power to heal, this time the mother-in-law of Peter with a single touch. And that evening many more come who are healed with a word. Once again the power of Christ's speech is underlined here.

In the previous chapter we're told that he spoke with authority and not as the scribes and now we're told that he is one who can cast out demons with a word, who can heal with a word. And in these respects he's fulfilling the prophecy of Isaiah. He took our illnesses and bore our diseases.

In the context of Isaiah chapter 53 many have seen these things as referring to the cross but yet Matthew presents Jesus' life and ministry fulfilling this prophecy also. Jesus perhaps should be seen as taking these things upon himself. He is not just removing it, he's taking it upon himself.

The death of the world, the sickness of the world, the demonic possession of the world, he's taking it upon himself all in preparation to deal with it finally at the cross. A question to consider, where else in the New Testament are we alerted to the fact that Peter has a wife?