

As it had been Told Them

Tuesday Bible Study Group

Session 1: *The Promise!*

(<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Protevangelium>)

Protoevangelium: In Christian theology, the **protoevangelium** (also known as the **protevangeliu**m, **proto-evangelium** or **protoevangelion**) is God's statement to the **Serpent** in the **Garden of Eden** about how the **seed of the woman** would crush the serpent's head: "*And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.*" (Gen 3:15, KJV)

"I will put enmities between thee and the woman, and thy seed and her seed: she shall crush thy head, and thou shalt lie in wait for her heel." (Genesis 3:15, Douay-Rheims)

Protoevangelium is a compound of two Greek words, *protos* meaning "*first*" and *evangelion* meaning "*good news*" or "*gospel*". Thus the protevangeliu

m in Genesis 3:15 is commonly referred to as the first mention of the good news of salvation in the Bible.

Strictly speaking, the protoevangelium refers to the last part of Genesis 3:15, "*it shall bruise thy head and thou shalt bruise his heel.*" According to H. C. Leupold, this passage uses a **zeugma** in the word "bruise", which may be translated "*it shall crush thy head and thou shalt bruise his heel.*"

Because of the grave nature of the context – the fall of man – some interpreters perceive this passage as describing more than just a man stepping on a snake's head. The reference to the seed of the woman as **Christ** is believed to relate to the Virgin birth of the Messiah, as well as the Hypostatic union of the Divine nature with the Human nature of Christ.^[4]

Old Testament scholar **Derek Kidner** describes the Protoevangelium as "the first glimmer of the gospel." *Several of the early Church fathers, such as Justin Martyr* (160 AD) and

Irenaeus (180 AD), regarded this verse "as the Protoevangelium, the first messianic prophecy in the Old Testament." (Source: Website: Wikipedia)

What Does Genesis 3:15 Mean?

(https://www.blueletterbible.org/faq/don_stewart/don_stewart_756.cfm)

In the third chapter of Genesis we find one of the most important verses in Scripture: "*And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel.*" (Genesis 3:15)

According to this verse, there will be enmity between the individual woman (Eve) and the serpent who deceived her. The word enmity indicates a blood feud. There will also be enmity between his seed and her seed. God promised that eventually the serpent would bruise the heel of the seed of the woman. However, the seed of the woman would also bruise (or crush) the head of the serpent. This will be a fatal blow. Who is the seed of the woman and who is the seed of the serpent? What do these predictions mean?

In Genesis 3, there is no explanation of the phrase the seed of the woman. The seed is to be understood as either one individual or a group of people whose appearance would be some time in the future. It was a promise of someone or some people to come.

Many commentators understand it to refer initially to redeemed humanity and then ultimately to Jesus Christ. Therefore the seed of the woman began with Abel, the second son of Adam and Eve. Cain, the first son, would not qualify because he was a murderer. The comment of Eve, upon the birth of the third son mentioned, Seth, seems to show that she understood Abel as part of the fulfillment of the promised seed.

And Adam knew his wife again, and she bore a son and named him Seth, For God has appointed another seed for me instead of Abel, whom Cain killed (Genesis 4:25).

The ultimate seed of the woman would be Jesus Himself. Therefore, we have in Genesis 3:15, the first promise of a Redeemer. It is the beginning of a long line of prophecies concerning the coming Messiah. The Promised One would be from the woman's seed an indication of the eventual virgin birth of Christ.

Some Bible students see that seed of the woman as referring to humanity in general. They believe that Cain was the beginning of the fulfillment of this prophecy that was eventually culminated in Christ.

The seed of the serpent would bruise the heel of the seed of the woman. On the cross Satan bruised the heel of Christ, causing His death. Bruising suggests something that was not ultimate or final. Christ died on our behalf being made sin for us (2 Corinthians 5:21). He bore our judgment upon Calvary's cross and, in doing so, bruised His heel. Though wounded, the damage done to Jesus was not final, for He came back from the dead three days later.

The phrase seed of the serpent also has various explanations. It does not mean the physical descendants of the Devil but rather those who are his spiritual descendants. There is no indication that Satan ever had any physical offspring.

Some feel seed of the serpent speaks of unredeemed humanity beginning with Adam and Eve's first son Cain and continuing on to all those who oppose God. Jesus called the religious leaders of his day the children of the Devil (John 8:44).

There is also the view that the seed of the serpent refers to the creatures who have fallen like Satan. These include demons and fallen angels.

The seed of the woman will crush the serpent's head indicating Satan's ultimate defeat as pronounced by Paul: *"And the God of peace will crush Satan under your feet shortly"* (Romans 16:20). This has three different aspects: At The Cross (John 12:31); the Second Coming (Revelation 20:1-4), and in the Lake Of Fire (Revelation 20:7-10).

From an examination of Genesis 3:15 we can make the following conclusions.

1. The seed of the woman refers either to humanity in general or more specifically to redeemed humanity beginning with Abel. Most agree it has its ultimate fulfillment in Christ.
2. The bruised heel of the seed of the woman refers to the crucifixion of Christ.
3. The bruised head of the serpent speaks to the final judgment of Satan.

(Source: Website "Blue Letter Bible" Author: Dan Stewart)

What does Genesis 3:15 mean that "he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel"?

<https://www.gotquestions.org/crush-head-bruise-heel.html>

In Genesis 3 God metes out various judgments against those who brought sin into His perfect world. Adam, Eve, and the serpent all hear of the consequences of their rebellion. To the serpent God says, in part, *"And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel"* (Genesis 3:15, KJV).

Even in this judgment, there is mercy. God's curse on the serpent, in particular, was laced with words of hope. The woman mentioned in [Genesis 3:15](#) is Eve. The serpent, addressed directly, is the animal that Satan used to deceive the woman. Some of the curse was directed at the animal (verse 14); at the same time, the curse of God falls upon [Satan](#), who had taken the serpent's form or body in Eden (cf. the dragon in [Revelation 12:9](#)).

As part of the curse, enmity—mutual hatred and ill will—will exist between the woman and the serpent. Later, the same enmity will continue between the woman's seed or offspring (mankind in general, since Eve is the "mother of all living," [Genesis 3:20](#)) and the serpent's seed. Their offspring will remain enemies throughout all generations. The serpent's (metaphorical) offspring are demonic forces and

also those people who follow the devil and accomplish his will. Jesus called the Pharisees a “brood of vipers” in [Matthew 12:34](#) and said they belonged to their “father, the devil” in [John 8:44](#). In short, God says that Satan will always be the enemy of mankind. It follows that people who side with Satan will be at perpetual war with God’s elect and that we are engaged in a very real battle between good and evil ([Ephesians 6:12](#)).

[Genesis 3:15](#) is a remarkable verse, often called the [protoevangelium](#) (literally, “first gospel”), because it is the Bible’s first prediction of a Savior. The second half of the verse gives two messianic prophecies concerning that Savior: The first messianic prophecy in [Genesis 3:15](#) is that “he will crush your head.” That is, the seed of the woman will crush the serpent’s head. The Amplified Bible makes it clear that “the woman’s seed” is more than mankind in general; it is an individual representing all mankind: “And I will put enmity (open hostility) between you and the woman, and between your seed (offspring) and her Seed; He shall [fatally] bruise your head.”

The second messianic prophecy in [Genesis 3:15](#) is that “you will strike his heel.” That is, the serpent will bite the heel of “the woman’s seed.” The heel-bite is set in contrast to the head-crush, as the Amplified Bible brings out: “*And you shall [only] bruise His heel.*”

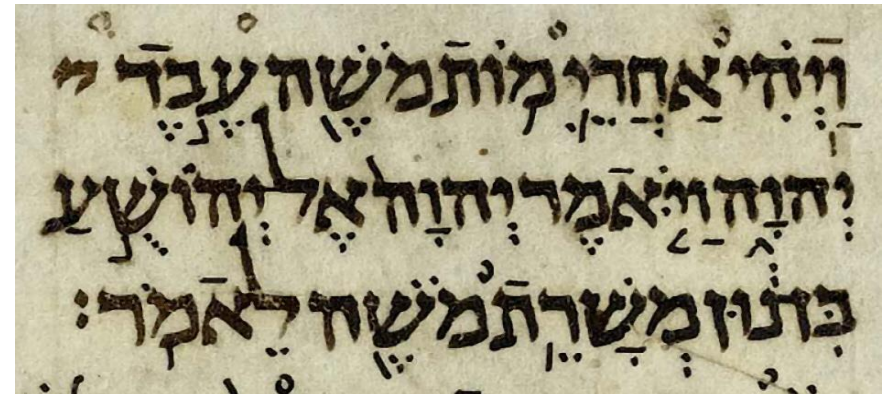
This passage points to the promise of Jesus’ birth, His redemption, and His victory over Satan. The woman’s offspring is Jesus. Being [virgin-born](#), He is literally the offspring of a woman ([Matthew 1:25](#); [Galatians 4:4](#); cf. [Isaiah 7:14](#)). Being the [Son of Man](#), He is the perfect representative of humankind. The devil’s offspring were the evil men and demonic forces who, like a snake, lay in wait for the Savior and struck at Him. Their venomous conspiracy condemned Jesus to be crucified.

But the serpent’s strike did not spell the end of the Offspring of the woman. Jesus rose the third day, breaking the power of death and winning the ultimate victory. With the cross, Jesus “crushed” the devil’s head, defeating him forever. So, in [Genesis 3:15](#), the crushing of the serpent’s head was a picture of Jesus’ triumph over sin and Satan at the cross (cf. [John 12:31](#)). The striking of the Messiah’s heel was a picture of the wounding and death of Jesus on the cross. Satan bruised Jesus’ “heel,” but Jesus showed complete dominance over Satan by bruising his “head.”

Satan, although still active in this world, is a defeated foe. His doom is sure: “And the devil . . . was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur” ([Revelation 20:10](#)). Until that time, there remains enmity between Satan and God’s children.

The protoevangelium shows us that God always had the plan of salvation in mind and informed us of His plan as soon as sin entered the world. Satan formulated a plan involving the serpent in Eden, but God was way ahead of him, having already ordained the Serpent-crusher. Jesus Christ perfectly fulfilled God’s mission: “The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil’s work” ([1 John 3:8](#)).

(Source: Website: Got Questions: Your Questions. Biblical Answers.)



Joshua 1:1 as recorded in the Aleppo Codex

Book of Genesis

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

The **Book of Genesis**^[a] is an account of the [creation of the world](#), the early history of humanity, and of Israel's ancestors and the origins of the [Jewish people](#).^[1] Its Hebrew name is the same as its [first word](#), *Bereshit* ("In the beginning").

Genesis is the first book of the [Hebrew Bible](#) and the Christian [Old Testament](#).^[2] It is divisible into two parts, the [primeval history](#) (chapters 1–11) and the [ancestral history](#) (chapters 12–50).^[3] The primeval history sets out the author's concepts of the nature of the deity and of humankind's relationship with its maker: God creates a world which is good and fit for mankind, but when man corrupts it with sin God decides to destroy his creation, sparing only the righteous [Noah](#) and his family to re-establish the relationship between man and God.^[4] The ancestral history (chapters 12–50) tells of the prehistory of [Israel](#), God's chosen people.^[5] At God's command, Noah's descendant [Abraham](#) journeys from his birthplace (described as [Ur of the Chaldeans](#) and whose identification with [Sumerian Ur](#) is [tentative in modern scholarship](#)) into the God-given land of [Canaan](#), where he dwells as a sojourner, as does his son [Isaac](#) and his grandson [Jacob](#). Jacob's name is changed to "Israel", and through the agency of his son [Joseph](#), the [children of Israel](#) descend into Egypt, 70 people in all with their households and God promises them a future of greatness. Genesis ends with Israel in Egypt, ready for the coming of [Moses](#) and [the Exodus](#). The narrative is punctuated by a series of [covenants](#) with God, successively narrowing in scope from all mankind (the [covenant with Noah](#)) to a special relationship with one people alone (Abraham and his descendants through Isaac and Jacob).

In [Judaism](#), the theological importance of Genesis centres on the covenants linking [God](#) to his [chosen people](#) and the people to

the [Promised Land](#). Christianity has interpreted Genesis as the prefiguration of certain cardinal Christian beliefs, primarily the need for [salvation](#) (the hope or [assurance](#) of all Christians) and the [redemptive act](#) of [Christ](#) on the Cross as the [fulfilment of covenant promises](#) as the [Son of God](#).

Tradition credits Moses as the [author of Genesis](#), as well as the books of [Exodus](#), [Leviticus](#), [Numbers](#) and most of [Deuteronomy](#), but modern scholars, especially from the 19th century onward, see them as being written hundreds of years after Moses is supposed to have lived, in the 6th and 5th centuries BC. Based on scientific interpretation of archaeological, genetic, and linguistic evidence, most scholars consider Genesis to be primarily [mythological](#) rather than [historical](#).

Structure

Genesis appears to be structured around the recurring phrase *elleh toledot*, meaning "these are the generations," with the first use of the phrase referring to the "generations of heaven and earth" and the remainder marking individuals—Noah, the "sons of Noah", Shem, etc., down to Jacob.^[9] The *toledot* formula, occurring eleven times in the book of Genesis, delineating its sections and shaping its structure, serves as a heading which marks a transition to a new subject.

It is not clear, however, what this meant to the original authors, and most modern commentators divide it into two parts based on the subject matter, a "primeval history" (chapters 1–11) and a "patriarchal history" (chapters 12–50). While the first is far shorter than the second, it sets out the basic themes and provides an interpretive key for understanding the entire book.^[13] The "primeval history" has a symmetrical structure hinging on chapters 6–9, the flood story, with the events before the flood mirrored by the events after; the "ancestral history" is structured around the three patriarchs [Abraham](#), [Jacob](#) and [Joseph](#). (The stories of [Isaac](#) do not make up a coherent cycle of stories and function as a bridge between the cycles of Abraham and Jacob.)

Themes

Promises to the ancestors

In 1978 [David Clines](#) published his influential *The Theme of the Pentateuch* – influential because he was one of the first to take up the question of the theme of the entire five books. Clines' conclusion was that the overall theme is "the partial fulfilment – which implies also the partial nonfulfillment – of the promise to or blessing of the Patriarchs". (By calling the fulfilment "partial" Clines was drawing attention to the fact that at the end of Deuteronomy the people are still outside Canaan.)

The [patriarchs](#), or ancestors, are Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, with their wives (Joseph is normally excluded). Since the name YHWH had not been revealed to them, they worshipped El in his various manifestations. (It is, however, worth noting that in the Jahwist source, the patriarchs refer to deity by the name YHWH, for example in Genesis 15.) Through the patriarchs, God announces the election of Israel, that is, he chooses Israel to be his special people and commits himself to their future. God tells the patriarchs that he will be faithful to their descendants (i.e. to Israel), and Israel is expected to have faith in God and his promise. ("Faith" in the context of Genesis and the Hebrew Bible means an agreement to the promissory relationship, not a body of a belief.)

The promise itself has three parts: offspring, blessings, and land. The fulfilment of the promise to each patriarch depends on having a male heir, and the story is constantly complicated by the fact that each prospective mother – [Sarah](#), [Rebekah](#) and [Rachel](#) – is barren. The ancestors, however, retain their faith in God and God in each case gives a son – in Jacob's case, twelve sons, the foundation of the chosen [Israelites](#). Each succeeding generation of the three promises attains a more rich fulfilment, until through Joseph "all the world" attains salvation from famine, and by bringing the children of Israel down to Egypt he becomes the means through which the promise can be fulfilled.

God's chosen people

Scholars generally agree that the theme of divine promise unites the patriarchal cycles, but many would dispute the efficacy of trying to examine Genesis' theology by pursuing a single overarching theme, instead citing as more productive the analysis of the Abraham cycle, the Jacob cycle, and the Joseph cycle, and the [Yahwist](#) and [Priestly sources](#). The problem lies in finding a way to unite the patriarchal theme of the divine promise to the stories of Genesis 1-11 (the [primeval history](#)) with their theme of God's forgiveness in the face of man's evil nature. One solution is to see the patriarchal stories as resulting from God's decision not to remain alienated from mankind: God creates the world and mankind, mankind rebels, and God "elects" (chooses) Abraham.^[6]

To this basic plot (which comes from the [Yahwist](#)) the [Priestly source](#) has added a series of [covenants](#) dividing history into stages, each with its own distinctive "sign". The [first covenant](#) is between God and all living creatures, and is marked by the sign of the rainbow; the second is with the descendants of Abraham ([Ishmaelites](#) and others as well as Israelites), and its sign is [circumcision](#); and the last, which does not appear until the [Book of Exodus](#), is with Israel alone, and its sign is [Sabbath](#). A great leader mediates each covenant ([Noah](#), Abraham, [Moses](#)), and at each stage God progressively reveals himself by his name ([Elohim](#) with Noah, [El Shaddai](#) with Abraham, [Yahweh](#) with Moses).^[6]

For more on who wrote the Book of Genesis click here:

<https://zondervanacademic.com/blog/who-wrote-genesis>

Deuteronomy 18:18

(<https://www.biblestudytools.com/commentaries/gills-exposition-of-the-bible/deuteronomy-18-18.html>)

I will raise them up a prophet from among their brethren like unto thee

So that it seems this promise or prophecy was first made at Mount Sinai, but now renewed and repeated, and which is nowhere else recorded; see ([Deuteronomy 18:15](#)) when they were not only made easy for the present by appointing Moses to receive from the Lord all further notices of his mind and will, but were assured that when it was his pleasure to make a new revelation, or a further discovery of his mind and will, in future times, he would not do it in that terrible way he had delivered the law to them; but would raise up a person of their own flesh and blood, by whom it should be delivered, which was sufficient to prevent their fears for the future: *“and will put my word in his mouth;”*

The doctrines of the Gospel, which come from God, and are the words of truth, faith, righteousness, peace, pardon, life, and salvation; and which Christ says were not his own, as man and Mediator, but his Father's, which he gave unto him, and put into his mouth, as what he should say, teach, and deliver to others; see ([John 7:16](#)) ([8:28](#)) ([John 17:6](#) [John 17:8](#))

“and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him;” nor did he keep back, but faithfully declared the whole counsel of God; and as he gave him a commandment what he should say, and what he should speak, he was entirely obedient to it; see ([John 12:49](#) [John 12:50](#)) ([15:15](#)).

What Does Deuteronomy 18:18 Mean? ►

(<https://dailyverse.knowing-jesus.com/deuteronomy-18-18>)

“I will raise up a prophet from among their countrymen like you, and I will put My words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him.” Deuteronomy 18:18(NASB)

When God says something through His prophets, we should take heed of what they say. But when God Himself, restates a truth – multiple times, we should take especial note of what the Lord is saying.

Only a few verse earlier, Moses had informed the second generation of Israelites that the LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me. He will come from among you. He will be one of your countrymen, and you shall listen to Him.

In this later verses, it is the Lord, Himself who speaks.. and says to Moses I will raise up a prophet from among their countrymen like you. I will put My words in His mouth. My Prophet shall speak to them all the things that I command Him to speak.

We understand that this chosen Prophet, about Whom God was speaking, was the Lord Jesus, for He was the Seed of the woman who was to crush the serpent's head. He was the Seed of Abraham, through Whom all the families of the earth would be blessed.

He was to be God's King Who would come from the tribe of Judah, and He was to be God's Priest, after the order of Melchisedec. Jesus was God's Days-man for whom Job longed, who would come from the nation of Israel. Yes, Jesus was God's chosen Prophet, in this verse, Who would save His people from their sins – and He was God's Sacrificial Lamb, Who was slain from the foundation of the world.

This was to be the greatest Prophet of all prophets, Who would represent man to God and God to mankind. We know Him as Jesus, the one true Mediator.. of a new and better covenant.

This future Prophet would be even greater than Moses.. who was the prophet whom all Old Testament prophets would look up to, for centuries to come, for He would be the ultimate Prophet – the image of the invisible God, the Word made flesh, the only begotten Son of the Most High, Who is in the bosom of the Father.

OTHER BIBLE COMMENTARIES

(<https://biblehub.com/commentaries/deuteronomy/18-18.htm>)

Matthew Henry's Concise Commentary

18:15-22 It is here promised concerning Christ, that there should come a Prophet, great above all the prophets; by whom God would make known himself and his will to the children of men, more fully and clearly than he had ever done before. He is the Light of the world, Joh 8:12. He is the World by whom God speaks to us, Joh 1:1; Heb 1:2. In his birth he should be one of their nation. In his resurrection he should be raised up at Jerusalem, and from thence his doctrine should go forth to all the world. Thus God, having raised up his Son Christ Jesus, sent him to bless us. He should be like unto Moses, only above him. This prophet is come, even JESUS; and is He that should come, and we are to look for no other. The view of God which he gives, will not terrify or overwhelm, but encourages us. He speaks with fatherly affection and Divine authority united. Whoever refuses to listen to Jesus Christ, shall find it is at his peril; the same that is the Prophet is to be his Judge, Joh 12:48. Woe then to those who refuse to hearken to His voice, to accept His salvation, or yield obedience to His sway! But happy they who trust in Him, and obey Him. He will lead them in the paths of safety and peace, until He brings them to the land of perfect light, purity, and happiness. Here is a caution against false prophets. It highly concerns us to have a right touchstone wherewith to try the word we hear, that we may know what that word is which the Lord has not spoken. Whatever is against the plain sense of the written word, or which gives countenance or encouragement to sin, we may be sure is not that which the Lord has spoken.

Barnes' Notes on the Bible

The ancient fathers of the Church and the generality of modern commentators have regarded our Lord as the prophet promised in these verses. It is evident from the New

Testament alone that the Messianic was the accredited interpretation among the Jews at the beginning of the Christian era (compare the marginal references, and [John 4:25](#)); nor can our Lord Himself, when He declares that Moses "wrote of Him" [John 5:45-47](#), be supposed to have any other words more directly in view than these, the only words in which Moses, speaking in his own person, gives any prediction of the kind. But the verses seem to have a further, no less evident if subsidiary, reference to a prophetic order which should stand from time to time, as Moses had done, between God and the people; which should make known God's will to the latter; which should by its presence render it unnecessary either that God should address the people directly, as at Sinai ([Deuteronomy 18:16](#); compare [Deuteronomy 5:25](#) ff), or that the people themselves in lack of counsel should resort to the superstitions of the pagan.

In fact, in the words before us, Moses gives promise both of a prophetic order, and of the Messiah in particular as its chief; of a line of prophets culminating in one eminent individual. And in proportion as we see in our Lord the characteristics of the prophet most perfectly exhibited, so must we regard the promise of Moses as in Him most completely accomplished.

Pulpit Commentary

Verse 18. - *And will put my words in his mouth*; will so reveal to him my mind, and so inspire him to utter it, that the words he speaks shall be really my words. The question has been raised whether, by the Prophet like unto Moses, here promised to the people of Israel, is to be understood some eminent individual, or whether this refers to the prophetic διαδοχή, or succession, that was to continue under the theocracy. For the latter the context strongly speaks, for: (1) the contrast between what God here forbids the Israelites to do, viz. to resort to diviners and soothsayers, and the provision he would make for them so as to render this

needless, point to a succession of prophets rather than to one individual;

(2) the reference in what follows to the discrimination of false prophets from true prophets, shows that a multiplicity and a succession of prophets was in the view of the speaker, not a single individual; and

(3) as a succession of priests, of judges, and of kings was contemplated in this part of the Mosaic legislation, the presumption is that a succession also of prophets was contemplated. At the same time, the use of the singular here is remarkable, for nowhere else is the singular, **nabhi**, employed to designate more than one individual; and this **suggests** that the reference here may be to some individual in whom not only was the succession to culminate as in its crown and eminence, but whose spirit was to pervade the whole succession, - that each member of it should exercise his functions only as that Spirit which was in them did signify ([1 Peter 1:11](#)). It is possible also, as Oryon Gerlach has suggested, that "Prophet" here may be used as "seed" isin [Genesis 3:15](#), and that this is a prediction of Christ as the True Prophet, just as the assurance to Eve was a prediction of the Messiah, who, as the Head and Crown of the "godly seed," should end the conflict with the serpent and his seed by a crushing victory. It is to be considered also that, whilst the words "like unto me" do not necessarily imply a resemblance in **all** respects between Moses and the Prophet here promised, and whilst they may be well applied to One superior in many respects to Moses, it would be taking them at much below their real worth were we to understand them of one greatly inferior to Moses, as all the prophets who succeeded him in Israel were until the Chief came ([Deuteronomy 34:10](#); [Hebrews 3:1-6](#)). Finally, there can be no doubt that the Jews expected that the Messiah would appear as the Prophet by pre-eminence, and that they founded that expectation on the promise here recorded (cf. [John 1:21](#); [John 6:14](#); [Acts 3:22-26](#); [Acts 7:37](#)). It may be

added that our Lord seems to apply this to himself, when he says to the Jews, "There is one that accuseth you, even Moses, in whom ye trust. For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me: for he wrote of me" ([John 5:45, 46](#); cf. also John 11:48-50). How early and how widespread was the expectation that the Messiah would come as a prophet, may be inferred from the existence of this among the Samaritans ([John 4:25](#)). It is to be concluded, then, that this promise has reference ultimately to the Messiah, the Great Revealer of God, between whom and Moses there should be a long succession of prophets, so that there should always be a medium of Divine communication between Jehovah and his people. Deuteronomy 18:18

Commentary on Micah 5:2-5a

<https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/fourth-sunday-of-advent-3/commentary-on-micah-52-5a-3>

The prophet Micah was active during a tumultuous period in Israel's history.

According to the book, Micah prophesied during the reigns of the kings Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, who reigned during the late eighth and early seventh centuries (759-687 BCE). At this time, Israel and Judah experienced great turmoil as the Assyrians invaded the region. The Assyrians captured Samaria, the capital of the northern kingdom, in 722 BCE. The southern kingdom of Judah also witnessed military threat. During Hezekiah's reign, the Assyrian king Sennacherib carried out a military campaign in 701, attacking several towns in Judah (see 2 Kings 18-19; Micah 1:10-16) before retreating from Jerusalem. As there were threats on the international stage, there were also great changes in the culture. During this era, Judah's economy expanded and shifted from a barter society to a mercantile society in which money was traded for goods. According to the prophet, corruption and hypocrisy were rampant. Jerusalem's "rulers give judgment for a bribe, its priests teach for a price, its

prophets give oracles for money; yet they lean upon the Lord and say, 'Surely the Lord is with us! No harm shall come upon us'" (Micah 3:11).

God's promise enters this perilous and pernicious world in a surprising way. The oracle in chapter 5 vows that God's ancient covenant with Israel is secure and reliable, even as it may come about in an unexpected manner. The oracle provides assurance that God's covenant with David – the one "from of old, from ancient days" – is eternal and is still operative, even as Judah is under threat. The covenant will be fulfilled with a new leader in the line of David. Yet this new ruler will rise not from Jerusalem, the royal city, but from Bethlehem, a small village. He will not exercise military might like the Assyrians but will be one of peace who provides for his people as a shepherd. There are several allusions to David in the image of this ruler, including his birthplace in Bethlehem, which was also the birthplace of David, and his pastoral image as shepherd, David's occupation.

It is a consistent theme through the Bible that God delights in upsetting human expectations. Abraham and Sarah did not expect to bear a child in old age, and yet Isaac, whose name means "he laughs," was such a preposterous surprise that it prompted Sarah's laughter (Genesis 20:1-7). David, who was the smallest of his brothers, was anointed as the king (1 Samuel 16). The ruler promised in Micah's oracle comes from an unexpected place in an unexpected way. This divine habit of eschewing expectations also echoes in the New Testament, as Mary receives a surprise announcement that she will bear a child (Luke 1) and as Jesus enters the world not as a triumphant ruler but as a vulnerable child.

Micah 5 is one of the texts that the gospels reference to interpret who Jesus is. In the Gospel of Matthew, the wise men cite Micah's oracle to inform King Herod that the Messiah will be born in Bethlehem (Matthew 2:6), and the Gospel of John refers to a group of people who refer to this text in understanding Jesus' identity (John 7:40-43). In its eighth-century context,

Micah's oracle offers a particular word to a specific community. Yet it takes on new life in God's ongoing activity of remaining faithful to covenant promises by subverting expectation.

The irony of Advent is that this season of preparation anticipates a hopeful expectation of that which is unexpected. Those who have heard these Scriptures so many times, year after year of Advent celebration, may have trouble fully appreciating their startling logic. Yet perhaps we need look no further than our own lives. Micah calls us to see God's faithfulness in surprising ways, to look where we might not expect. Micah's oracle serves as a reminder that the promise of God's covenant is certain, yet the expression of its fulfillment is not always predictable.

Micah's oracle speaks to a world that is caught in the bewilderment of violence, uncertainty, and economic disruption. While there is much that separates us from eighth-century Judah, these dynamics are not unlike the world in which we live. We too know terror and fragility on national, international, and personal planes. We too seek hope that the world will be different. We too yearn for security and peace. The promise of Micah is that God will be faithful and will appear in surprising ways. As Advent draws to a close, Micah invites us to look for God's presence where we least expect and to be attuned to the voices of the small, the powerless, and the vulnerable. Are we prepared to be surprised? Are we prepared to welcome the Holy One into our midst?

Anne Stewart: Vice President for External Relations; Princeton Theological Seminary. Princeton, N.J.