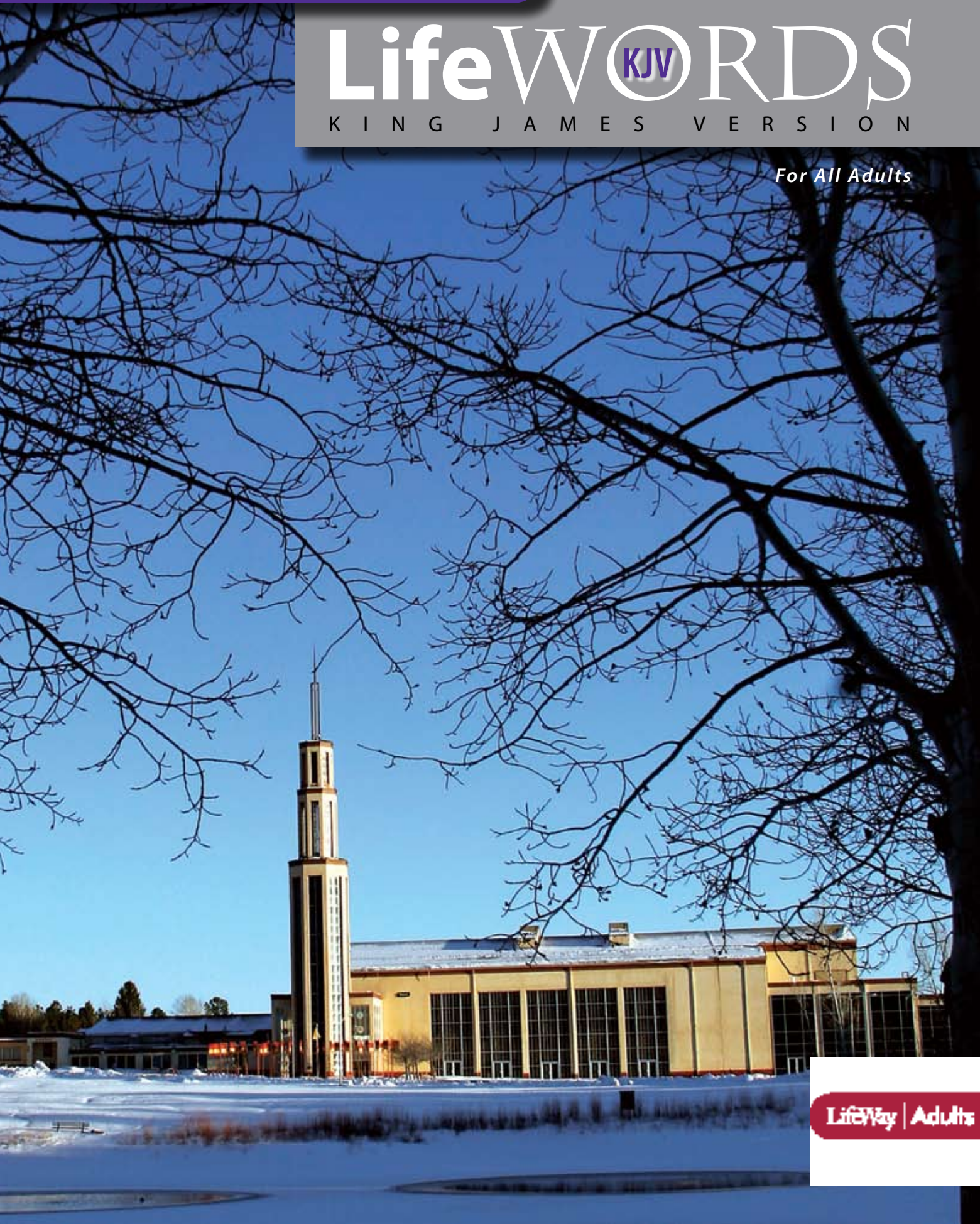


LEADER GUIDE | WINTER 2009-10 *Bible Studies for Life*

LifeWORDS

K I N G J A M E S V E R S I O N

For All Adults



LifeWay | Adults

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Life WORDS KJV Leader Guide is designed for teachers of adults. We believe the Bible has God for its author; salvation for its end; and truth, without any mixture of error, for its matter and that all Scripture is totally true and trustworthy. The 2000 statement of *The Baptist Faith and Message* is our doctrinal guideline. The suggestions in this resource for pronouncing Bible names are from *That's Easy for You to Say: Your Quick Guide to Pronouncing Bible Names*, copyright © 1997 by B&H Publishing Group. Used by permission.

Acknowledgments: Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from the King James Version.

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† Evangelism Lesson

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Teaching the Lesson

Needed for the Session

- Learner Guides**, paper, and pencils or pens
- Step 1: **God's Christmas Songs** poster (**Pack Item 1**)
- Step 2: **Divided Kingdom** map (**Pack Item 2**)
- Step 2: Copies of the **Significant People; Insignificant Places** handout (**Pack Item 3**) for each learner
- Step 5: *Baptist Hymnal*, 1991 or 2008 edition



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<http://www.lifeway.com/extra>

Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus

Bible Passages

Micah 5:1-5a; 7:18-20

What This Lesson Is About

Micah prophesied to a people who literally were under siege. He told them God is the source of salvation and security. Micah's prophetic words found their ultimate fulfillment in Jesus the Messiah.

Why This Lesson Is Important

Adults today are under siege in a variety of ways. Ultimately, their needs are met in Jesus.

How This Lesson Can Impact Your Life

This lesson can impact your life by leading you to the salvation and security available in Jesus.

Lesson Outline

- We Need Significance (Micah 5:1-3)
- We Need Shepherding (Micah 5:4-5a)
- We Need Salvation (Micah 7:18-20)

Preparing the Lesson

As a high school and college student, I was deeply interested in history, particularly the American Civil War. During my early study of that long and bloody conflict, I learned from both textbooks and teachers about a *siege* as a military tactic. In a siege, military forces surround a town or fortress and establish a blockade against it in an effort to weaken it and make it vulnerable to capture.

The effects of a siege can be devastating. For example, commanders of the Union army decided Vicksburg, Mississippi, was vital to victory. If Union forces could capture that Mississippi River town, the North could control the river's traffic and cut off the flow of vital supplies to the Confederate Army.

After a failed assault on May 22, 1863, Union General Ulysses S. Grant decided that only a siege would allow him to take the city, and he began to implement one. The six-week-long siege worked. Confederate General John Pemberton surrendered on July 4, 1863. The people inside the city suffered terribly; the Confederate cemetery near Vicksburg gives testimony to this.

The siege was often a successful, efficient military tactic in ancient warfare as well, but it was horrifically cruel. Because most key cities were built on elevations and walled for defense, conquering them was difficult and costly. One method of conquest was to surround a city, cut off all traffic in and out of it, and slowly starve the inhabitants into submission. Not only were defending soldiers weakened and/or starved to death, but innocent inhabitants caught in the encircling vise also perished. Unsanitary conditions bred a variety of terrible diseases, and people were reduced to competing savagely for the resources they needed to survive.

With all this in mind, let's consider events that took place over 2,700 years ago. God's spokesman Micah prophesied to people who literally were under siege and would be yet again. The immediate setting of his words may have been the Assyrian siege of Jerusalem in 701 B.C. He likely used that event to prophesy concerning the Babylonian siege that would take place in 587/86 B.C. and to point to the even more distant future when God would provide a Ruler greater than David. The promised Ruler would provide security—something extremely important to people who are under siege. Micah's encouraging message to Judah's inhabitants was that people experience safety in God. This promise ultimately would be fulfilled in the Messiah.

Micah prophesied more than 700 years before God's Messiah and true King, Jesus, was born in Bethlehem. The hymn "Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus" beautifully captures the messianic hope God's people kept alive through those many long centuries of waiting. In addition, the hymn also captures many of Micah's emphases:

- God's Messiah was born to set His people free from their fears and their sins. In Him, His people find rest.

Teaching the Lesson

Step 1: Introduction

□ Display and direct learners' attention to the **God's Christmas Songs** poster (**Pack Item 1**). (If this item is unavailable, write the study theme, lesson titles, Scripture references, and dates on a large sheet of paper.) Briefly introduce this study. Indicate that the study theme will seek to use various Christmas carols to underscore certain elements in various Bible passages that convey the Christmas message.

□ **Learner Guide** Write *UNDER SIEGE* on the board. Use the introduction on page 8 of the **Learner Guide** to initiate a discussion about what a *siege* is and the devastation it can cause. Use the introduction in the commentary on this page to give a specific example of a military siege and to describe its effectiveness. Emphasize that during the time Micah prophesied, God's people were under siege. Use the commentary on this page to provide background information on their circumstances.

□ As the "Why This Lesson Is Important" statement on page 8 affirms, "Adults today are under siege in a variety of ways." Ask: *In what ways are people under siege in their personal lives?* After giving

learners time to respond, lead a discussion in which you explore with learners what it means to be under siege. Possible areas of personal siege may include financial, relational, cultural, spiritual, and vocational.

- Make the point while many differences exist between being under military siege and being under personal siege, similarities also exist. Both produce feelings and/or a sense of
 - being threatened
 - helplessness
 - anxiety
 - insecurity
 - hopelessness
 - discouragement
 - an awareness of a lack of resources
- If time allows, discuss other emotional effects that may result from being under siege.
- Emphasize that even when we're managing areas of our lives in a responsible manner, our circumstances still can threaten and challenge us in numerous areas, causing us to feel like we're under siege. Say: *Like the people to whom Micah prophesied, we feel a strong need for security and safety. These needs are met in God's Messiah, the "Long-Expected Jesus" about whom Micah prophesied. He gives us security and safety by providing significance, shepherding, and salvation. Stress this does not mean we no longer will be under*

- He was "Israel's strength and consolation, Hope of all the earth."
- The Messiah was "Born a child, and yet a King."
- At a time of God's choosing—"the fullness of the time" (Gal. 4:4)—The Lord made good on His promise to send a Deliverer from David's line.

Many adults today are under siege financially, relationally, culturally, and spiritually. They long for safety and security. The safety they seek can be found only in Jesus the Messiah.

When have you felt the siege of finances, family problems, a godless culture, or spiritual onslaught? Indicate below some words that describe how you felt.

- | | | |
|--|-----------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Hopeless | <input type="checkbox"/> Starved | <input type="checkbox"/> Confident |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Rich | <input type="checkbox"/> Stressed | <input type="checkbox"/> Fearful |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Jealous | <input type="checkbox"/> Angry | <input type="checkbox"/> Exhausted |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Joyful | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other(s): _____ | | |

We Need Significance (Micah 5:1-3)

¹Now gather thyself in troops, O daughter of troops: he hath laid siege against us: they shall smite the judge of Israel with a rod upon the cheek.

²But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting.

³Therefore will he give them up, until the time that she which travaileth hath brought forth: then the remnant of his brethren shall return unto the children of Israel.

The prophet Micah ministered in the Southern Kingdom of Judah from about 735 B.C. to 700 B.C., although some of his messages were directed toward the Northern Kingdom of Israel. His ministry spanned a period of threat and extreme danger for the nation. Assyria invaded the Northern Kingdom in 722/21 B.C., conquered it, and took many of its inhabitants into exile. Ahaz, Judah's king from 735-715 B.C., willingly knuckled under to the Assyrians. Hezekiah became Judah's king in 715 B.C. and took steps to resist Assyrian control. Nevertheless, Judah faced the constant threat that the cruel and highly efficient Assyrian army would come in force to subdue the upstart, rebellious nation. Micah ministered under the cloud of this threat. He also addressed the internal decay in Judah's society.

In 711 B.C., the small kingdom of Ashdod revolted against Assyria and tried to persuade Judah to join their rebellion. Judah remained neutral and was spared devastation when Assyria crushed the revolt. Then in 701 B.C., when King Hezekiah tried to break free of Assyria, the Assyrian army marched into Judah and threatened Jerusalem directly. Only God's sending a devastating plague on the Assyrian army spared the city.

B Two previous *Biblical Illustrator* articles "Micah: His Life and Times" (Fall 1981) and "Lachish" (Spring 2006) relate to this lesson and can be found on the Winter 2009-2010 *Biblical Illustrator Plus* (CD-ROM).

Micah 5:1 likely points to the future Babylonian siege of Jerusalem in 587/86 B.C. **Now** connects verse 1 with 4:9-10, describing the Babylonians' capturing Jerusalem and taking many of Judah's people into exile. God eventually would rescue them; but before being restored, they would face siege, defeat, and exile.

Daughter refers to Jerusalem (see 4:10, "Daughter of Zion"). In 587/86 B.C., the Babylonians would lay siege to the city. By using the first person **us**, Micah compassionately identified with his people. The conquering Babylonians would **smite** Israel's (Judah's) **judge** on the face with a stick—the worst insult possible. *Judge* could refer to a civil leader but likely indicated Judah's own ruler or king. The Babylonians captured Judah's King Zedekiah and treated him cruelly.

Micah turned from prophesying concerning an event that would occur in the relatively near future to present God's marvelous redemptive act that would take place in the distant future. The Lord drew a sharp contrast between the defeated and humiliated ruler in 5:1 and the Ruler He would raise up. Through Micah, God addressed **Bethlehem** ("house of bread") in **Ephratah** [*EF ruh tuh*] ("fruitful"), probably a district in Judah. Although Bethlehem was the great King David's hometown, either its population was not adequate to provide 1,000 troops for battle or it was otherwise insignificant in standing **among** Judah's **thousands**. The word **little** may include both ideas. At any rate, Bethlehem was not prominent in Judah. In God's plans, however, the village would play a vitally significant role.

Phillips Brooks, a prominent 19th century pastor, beautifully captured Bethlehem's place in God's redemptive purpose. In his hymn "O Little Town of Bethlehem," he wrote that "the hopes and fears of all the years" came together ("met") on the night of Jesus' birth. The *little* village would host the Messiah's long-expected coming.

Surprisingly, from insignificant Bethlehem, God would place a **ruler in Israel**—the Messiah. The **goings forth**—the origins—of the future ruler God would provide would be **from of old, from everlasting**. We see here a reference to the Messiah's eternal preexistence. The words also can refer to the Messiah's being from the ancient line of David. God would send His Messiah, who would be in David's line but would be infinitely greater than any earthly king.

siege in various ways, for problems are common to all people, including Christians. However, Jesus gives us the resources to cope effectively with the challenges we face.

Step 2: We Need Significance (Micah 5:1-3)

- Invite a volunteer to read Micah 5:1-3.
- Display the **Divided Kingdom** map (**Pack Item 2**). (If this item is unavailable, use a map of the Divided Kingdom (Israel and Judah) in a Bible Atlas or in a Study Bible. You also may ask learners who have Bibles with maps to consult the maps of the Divided Kingdom in their Bibles.) Using the commentary on pages 10-11 and the map, discuss what was occurring in the Northern Kingdom (Israel) and Southern Kingdom (Judah) in Micah's day.
- ▶ Learner Guide** Ask a volunteer to read the first paragraph of commentary on page 9 of the **Learner Guide** that begins with "God inspired Micah...."
- Explain: *Micah described the people of his day as under intense stress and siege from threat of Assyrian invasion. Although Micah saw the Assyrians as the most prominent threat at hand, he also prophesied about the siege before the Babylonian invasion*

of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. (two centuries later). Micah brought messages of hope to all those who longed for God's presence through repentance.

❑ **Learner Guide** Say: *Repentance was important because God's people had strayed from the Lord and lived in rebellion and disobedience. We cannot experience the new hope the Messiah can give without turning from our sinful ways and being willing to allow Him to change us.* Use the story of Sam on page 11 of the **Learner Guide** to illustrate this point.

❑ Say: *God's people longed for a Messiah to deliver them out of all their stresses.* Mention that the Christmas season can be a particularly stressful time of year, especially for some people. Ask a volunteer to read Psalm 91:1-16. Ask: *In what ways does God promise to help His people?*

❑ Reread Micah 5:2. Ask: *According to this verse, how does God promise to help His people?* Using the commentary in the paragraph on page 11 that begins with "Micah turned from prophesying..." contrast the insignificant place called Bethlehem to the very significant Messiah from Bethlehem.

➤ **Learner Guide** Use "Discover Deeper Meaning" (**Learner Guide**, p. 10) in your discussion. Note that Micah 5:2 is quoted in Matthew 2:3-6).

Discover Deeper Meaning

Bethlehem is mentioned numerous times in the Old Testament. The first reference to the little village is in Genesis 35:19: Jacob's beloved wife "Rachel died, and was buried in the way to Ephrath, which is Bethlehem." The town also played a prominent role in the Book of Ruth. And before Jesus' birth it was best known as David's hometown—and the place where Samuel anointed the shepherd youth as Israel's second king (see 1 Sam. 16:1-13). Although the name *Bethlehem* is related to a Hebrew root that can mean "do battle," "fight," the general view is that it means "House of Bread." It was located about five miles southwest of Jerusalem. The term *Ephrath* may be a prominent clan name given to the district in which Bethlehem was located. In time, the name may have been used as a synonym for Bethlehem. Possibly, Ephrath was an older settlement that was absorbed into Bethlehem.

Centuries after Micah's prophecy, the virgin Mary gave birth to Jesus, God's promised Messiah. She and her husband Joseph traveled to Bethlehem to meet Roman census requirements. There, Jesus was born in the most humble circumstances. Later, when Herod the Great asked where the Messiah would be born, "the chief priests and scribes" quoted Micah 5:2 (see Matt. 2:3-6). In John 7:41-42, some questioned whether Jesus was "the Christ": they mistakenly thought He was born in Galilee since He grew up in Nazareth—and they referred to Micah's prophecy that declared the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem. Thus, from the time of Micah's prophecy to Jesus' birth, the expectation endured that Bethlehem would take center stage with respect to God's purpose. That expectancy was fulfilled when Jesus was born in the tiny, otherwise obscure and insignificant town.

Before the promised Ruler would appear, however, the people of Judah would be chastised for their sins. The word **therefore** introduces the reason the Ruler would be born in Bethlehem instead of the strategic and important city of Jerusalem. David's line would be brought low, so God would make a new start. God would **give... up** His people to conquering invaders who would take them into exile. Their distress would be temporary, however, for after a time a woman in labor—**she which travaileth**—would give birth, the meaning of **brought forth**. *She which travaileth* could indicate the covenant community out of which the Messiah would come. Some view the phrase as referring to Mary, the virgin who would give birth to Jesus. When the promised Ruler began His reign, the remnant of scattered exiles would return to form a united people.

God's people waited centuries for God to keep His promise to send the Messiah. God's timing was perfect. At precisely the right

time in God's plan, Jesus' birth in Bethlehem fulfilled the Lord's promise. The steadfast expectation of God's people teaches us we do well to wait patiently for God to keep His promises. We can persevere in knowing He always keeps His word.

Micah informed the people of Judah that God provides significance for the weak and oppressed. The prophet's emphasis that God works in unexpected ways and often with otherwise "ordinary" people encouraged the besieged nation. Today, people can find significance when they embrace God's plan for their lives—even when they feel weak, oppressed, or inadequate. Living in His grace and striving to do His will, everybody is somebody—everyone is significant.

Throughout Scripture, God used a great many "insignificant" people to accomplish His work.

- Fearing for his life, Moses fled Egypt "and dwelt in the land of Midian" (Ex. 2:11-15). When God called him to confront Pharaoh and to lead the Israelites out of Egypt, Moses offered various excuses, including this one: "I am not eloquent,...but I am slow of speech, and of a slow tongue" (3:7-4:10).
- Being the youngest, David was the last person in Jesse's family whom Samuel thought God wanted him to anoint as king of Israel (see 1 Sam. 16:1-13).
- In response to God's call to preach repentance to the wicked people of Nineveh, Jonah ran. After God chastised him, Jonah obeyed—but then sat in a place overlooking the city and pouted because God had spared Nineveh (see Jonah).
- Peter's performance as a disciple of Jesus was far less than stellar (see Matt. 16:21-23; Mark 14:66-72; John 13:8; 18:10-11). Yet God used him to spread the gospel powerfully in Jerusalem in the days of the early church (see Acts 1-5).

These are biblical examples, but examples from history abound as well. Dwight L. Moody (1837-1899), whose preaching profoundly influenced both Europe and America, was a shoe salesman. And in the early years of Billy Graham's ministry, many people believed another evangelist, Chuck Templeton, would be far more likely to have a profound impact on the world (see www.sbclife.org/Articles/2005/08/SLA1.asp). Also, as a young man, Billy Graham was shaken when the young woman he wanted to marry married someone else. And with regard to the ministry, Billy "believed he had no aptitude for preaching; but he became overwhelmingly conscious of an inner call, which...he accepted" (John Pollock, "Billy Graham and Modern Evangelism," in *Great Leaders of the Christian Church*, John D. Woodbridge, ed., [Chicago: Moody Press, 1988], 368). God often uses people many never believe would be among the most likely to succeed.

In what ways have you been surprised God has used you?

❑ Cut apart and distribute items in **Significant People; Insignificant Places (Pack Item 3)** to 6 volunteers and ask them to share the information provided. Discuss how well-known people often put their birthplaces "on the map." (If the pack item is unavailable, share the following examples:

- Ronald Reagan (died 2004) was born on February 6, 1911 in Tampico, Illinois. According to the U.S. Census, the population of Tampico in 2000 was 772.
- Harry Truman (died 1972) was born on May 8, 1884 in Lamar, Missouri. According to the U.S. Census, the population of Lamar in 2000 was 4,425.)

❑ Share that while Christ was and is significant, we human beings are very insignificant apart from Him. Using the commentary on this page, share information about people of faith in biblical and modern times whom God used despite their inabilities and weaknesses. Say: *When God uses us to do His work, He gets the credit. God is always turning conventional wisdom on its head.*

❑ **▶ Learner Guide ▶** Ask a learner to reread Micah 5:3. Invite a volunteer to read the paragraph on page 12 of the **Learner Guide** that begins with "Micah spoke"

❑ **▶ Learner Guide ▶** If time allows, use the interactive feature on

page 12 of the **Learner Guide** to enhance your discussion about Micah 5:1-3.

Discussion Starters for Micah 5:1-3

1. *Why do you think God chose an insignificant town like Bethlehem as the place for His Son Jesus to be born?*
2. *Do some situations and details in your life seem insignificant? How might God use these to defy conventional wisdom?*
3. *How would you encourage someone who is struggling with his or her self-image to find significance in Christ?*

Step 3: We Need Shepherding (Micah 5:4-5a)

- Invite a learner to read Micah 5:4-5a.
- Using the commentary on this page in the paragraph beginning, "Israel's leaders..." contrast the Messiah's kingship to the former rulers in Israel. Ask learners to think of reasons they long for Jesus to return to the earth and rule as King of kings and Lord of lords.
- Say: *While Micah foretold the birth of the Savior in Jesus' first coming in 5:1-2, he spoke of Jesus' rule as a Shepherd-King in His second coming in 5:4-5.*
- In light of Micah 5:4, encourage learners to reflect on Psalm 23. Invite a learner to read John 10:11. Ask: *What*

We Need Shepherding (Micah 5:4-5a)

⁴And he shall stand and feed in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God; and they shall abide: for now shall he be great unto the ends of the earth.

⁵And this man shall be the peace.

Israel's leaders formerly had failed to provide guidance and care for the people they were responsible to lead. In sharp contrast to other leaders, the Ruler (Messiah) God would send would **stand and feed** the people, giving them the shepherding they needed. The word *stand* indicates the Ruler would be installed as King or that His reign would last forever. The Messiah would tend the flock of God's people, giving them constant care. As God's appointed Shepherd, He would lead, nurture, and protect His people.

B Read the article "Shepherds as Old Testament Imagery" in the Winter 2009-2010 issue of *Biblical Illustrator* or on the Winter 2009-2010 *Biblical Illustrator Plus* (CD-ROM).

The Messiah would shepherd God's flock **in the strength of the LORD**, Israel's covenant God. He would exercise divine authority and function with God's limitless might. For emphasis, the Lord through Micah declared that the Ruler would minister **in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God**. The term *name* expresses God's revealed nature, who He is; and stands for His Person. *Majesty* carries the sense of excellence, authority, and power. Thus God would be at work in and through the Messiah to accomplish His purpose.

When God's promised Ruler would begin His reign, the people would **abide** securely. One essential function of a shepherd was to protect his flock from both animal and human predators. The Hebrew word translated *abide* includes the ideas of settling down and enduring. The Messiah would cause His people to live undisturbed by threat. Moreover, He would **be great unto the ends of the earth**; His power and authority would have a limitless reach.

Thus we see Micah identified the Ruler as one who would shepherd God's people in security. Jesus affirmed that He Himself was the Shepherd foreseen by Micah (and others); God sent Him to save those who would place their faith in Him as Messiah. In John 10:11, Jesus identified Himself as "the good shepherd," who willingly would give "his life for the sheep." The writer of Hebrews referred to "our Lord Jesus" as "that great shepherd of the sheep" (Heb. 13:20), and Peter wrote to believers that Jesus is the "Shepherd and Bishop [overseer] of your souls" (1 Pet. 2:25). Indeed, we do need shepherding—but we have not been left Shepherdless!

Because of the coming Messiah's strong and compassionate care for His people, Micah declared, **this man shall be the peace**. The Hebrew word rendered *peace* can convey the ideas of tranquility,

contentment, and safety. Micah declared his people would find **peace** when they followed the leadership of God's Shepherd. Yet the term conveys much more than an absence of conflict. It carries the idea of completeness, wholeness, and soundness—total well-being under God's rule. God's power as expressed through the Messiah produces such peace; human effort can neither create nor sustain it.

Adults often do not follow God because they consider themselves to be self-sufficient, relying on their own abilities and wisdom to live successfully. They think they know what is best. If we are to follow God's leading, we must recognize He is wiser than we are. Such recognition comes as we become increasingly familiar with God's character. Learning more about who God is and how He wants to relate to us sparks renewed reverence, worship, praise, and commitment; it triggers our thirst to know God better. One way we can help unbelieving family members and friends discover God's majesty is to invite and accompany them to Christmas events.

Describe how an increased understanding of the Christmas story from God's perspective can spark an interest in God and create a desire to know Him—even, and perhaps especially, among unbelievers.

We Need Salvation *(Micah 7:18-20)*

¹⁸Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? he retaineth not his anger forever, because he delighteth in mercy.

¹⁹He will turn again, he will have compassion upon us; he will subdue our iniquities; and thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea.

²⁰Thou wilt perform the truth to Jacob, and the mercy to Abraham, which thou hast sworn unto our fathers from the days of old.

Beginning in 7:8, the Book of Micah finishes with an upbeat, optimistic song of victory—and that song concludes with an offering of praise to God. With this expression of praise, Micah also ended his message to his people. Perhaps with a play on his own name, which means “who is like God,” Micah asked: **Who is a God like unto thee?** The rhetorical question anticipates the resounding answer, *No one, of course!* Micah praised God for His compassionate forgiveness. He celebrated the fact that the Lord **pardoneth** His people's twistedness or crookedness—their **iniquity**. God **passeth by**—He overlooks—people's **transgression** or rebellion—their willful rejection of His way. It's not that God ignores or tolerates disobedience, but rather that He does not allow His people's transgressions

*are some characteristics of a shepherd? (John 10:12-15 offers some insight.) Say: **Sheep totally depend on the strength of the shepherd, and rightly so.***

□ *Say: **Peace and security come only as we follow the leadership of the Good Shepherd. Most people of Micah's day did not listen to the voice of the Shepherd through Micah. Ask: Why do you think most adults today have a difficult time responding to the Shepherd and following Him?** (See the paragraph on this page that begins with “Adults often do not follow God...” Encourage learners to avoid making the mistake of failing to follow Him—for whatever reason.*

Discussion Starters for Micah 5:4-5a

- 1. How do you recognize the Good Shepherd? How can you know if you're hearing His voice (see John 10:3) and not someone or something else?*
- 2. How does the Shepherd feed you? Are you depending on Him to feed you, or are you looking to meet your deepest needs and longings elsewhere?*
- 3. How secure are you of your position in Christ in times of financial stress? in times of illness? in times of heartache? in times of persecution?*
- 4. In the midst of all the hustle and bustle this season, are you at peace? Explain.*
- 5. How does the world attempt to steal our peace? How does the Good Shepherd bring you true, everlasting peace this season?*

Step 4: We Need Salvation (Mic. 7:18-20)

- Enlist a learner to read Micah 7:18-20.
- Say: *Micah's name means, "who is like Yahweh?" so his question in verse 18 was a play on words. Ask: What message does this rhetorical question convey?*
- Discuss the following terms and their meanings.
 - First consider the words that indicate our hopelessly terrible condition.
Iniquity (v. 18), **iniquities** (v. 19)—mischief, deceitfulness, covering sin, twisting the truth about sin, rationalizing sin
Transgression (v. 18)—rebellion, willfully disobeying God
Sins—(v. 19) actions that miss God's mark or standard of righteousness
 - Then consider actions God takes to help us in our otherwise hopeless situations.
Pardoneth—(v. 18) to carry or take away
Passeth by—(v. 18) to pass through, to cover, to go beyond (as in the angel's passing over an Israelite's home because of blood on the doorposts—see Ex. 12:12-13)
Subdue—(v. 19) to bring under one's control.

When Under Siege

Susanna Annesley Wesley (1669-1742) knew what it was to be under siege. The youngest of 25 children, she married Samuel Wesley in 1688. They had 19 children, 9 of whom died as infants. Susanna had other difficulties as well. Twice her husband landed in jail because he was a poor financial manager, and twice their home burned down. In addition, in the aftermath of a minor disagreement, Samuel left his family for over a year. Nevertheless, Susanna persevered. She invested quality time in each of her children, and today she is remembered as a model for motherhood. Two of her sons were John (1703-1791) and Charles (1707-1788) Wesley, both of whom became influential Christian leaders. Interestingly, Charles Wesley penned the words to the hymns we recall in the titles of this week's Bible study and our Bible study for December 27.

How does Jesus' arrival on the earth at Christmas change your perspective about being under siege?

to nullify their relationships with Him. Micah's phrasing indicates that God's actions are characteristic of Him: by His very nature, He consistently responds to His people in these ways.

Rather than remain in **anger** over people's sins, God **delighteth in mercy**. God's *anger* is not the human emotion we know, but rather, it is His consistently strong opposition to wrong. *Mercy* expresses God's primary and pervading attribute (see 1 Chron. 16:34; Ps. 25:10; 103:8). The Hebrew term almost defies definition. Suggestions include "covenant love," "loyal love," "kindness," and "loving-kindness." The word could describe God's acts of mercy. It is the Old Testament term that is closest to the New Testament word translated *grace*. God takes great pleasure in being merciful, gracious, and kind. Doing so pleases Him. We can be grateful He *delighteth* in pardon, not in punishment!

Micah expressed His confidence that God **again** would deal tenderly with His people. The word translated **compassion** describes a mother's warm feelings for the child in her womb and a father's sensitivity to the needs of his child. Because He cares deeply for His people, God will remove or **subdue** our crookedness as one washing clothes might tread out or beat out dirt to cleanse them. Although people often commit **sins**—they miss God's mark for their lives and swerve from His path of good and right—when they repent sincerely, God will forgive them completely and remove their guilt forever. Micah depicted this victory over wrong as God's hurling **all** our sin **into the depths of the sea**, out of His sight and memory.

One of my interests since retiring immersed me in a detailed study of the misnamed "Parable of the Prodigal Son" in Luke 15:11-32.

The parable's focus is not as much on the lost son—actually, two lost sons—as it is on the loving father. The key to the parable well may be Jesus' statement that the waiting father, who is symbolic of God, saw his returning son in the distance and "had compassion" on him (v. 20). Our God is deeply compassionate, and even centuries before Jesus taught this truth, God through His spokesman Micah stressed it to His people.

God made and reaffirmed His covenant with their **fathers**. The Lord kept His covenant, even when His people broke it repeatedly. He remained faithful **to Jacob** and extended **mercy to Abraham**. Micah assured his besieged people God would continue to be faithful and gracious to them, as He was in **the days of old**.

As believers, we can feel confident in telling our neighbors that far from harboring an eagerness to judge and punish them, God wants to forgive their sins. We can encourage adults to ask for forgiveness by receiving Christ as Savior if they have not done so already. We must be clear that forgiveness comes only through Jesus Christ, the long-expected Messiah. If we have placed our faith in Christ, we can have confidence we possess the salvation God has made available through His Son, the Messiah and the Eternal King.

How can experiences when God shepherded you through difficult times contribute to your witness to the unsaved? Write out your personal salvation testimony on a separate sheet of paper. Include a brief account of how God met your needs during a time or times of "siege." Use the outline below when writing and sharing your testimony. (1) My life before Christ; (2) How I met Christ; and (3) My life with Christ (include your siege story here).

Biblical Truths of This Lesson in Focus

When driving in the afternoons, I sometimes tune my car radio to a financial advisor who offers practical advice on getting out of debt and achieving at least some measure of financial security. He tells callers to dispose of credit cards, sell items they don't need, establish an emergency fund, sell expensive cars and buy good used ones, and work more than one job if necessary. He challenges people to live within, not above, their means. These all are good steps to financial soundness. Interestingly, he always ends his program by pointing listeners to Jesus, the only One who ultimately gives spiritual peace. The prophet Micah still challenges us to take the steps of finding significance in Christ, of following the One who is our good Shepherd, and of living confidently in His salvation. These stepping stones lead to ultimate security. Be sure to take them.

Pray for people you know who are going through times of "siege." Invite them to your church's Christmas activities. Tell them about God's faithfulness, even during your own "siege" experiences.

- Using the commentary in the paragraph that begins on the previous page with the words, "One of my interests..." compare God's faithful love in Micah 7:19 to the love of the father in the parable of the prodigal son (see Luke 15:11-32). Say: *This is a beautiful portrait of the Author of Christmas!*

Discussion Starters for Micah 7:18-20

1. Do you see how awesome and incomparable God is? Do you know Him personally?
2. What effect does Christ's unchanging love have on your life? How are you sharing and showing His unchanging love and forgiveness to others?

Step 5: Conclusion

- **Learner Guide** Read and discuss Susannah Wesley's experience as related in "When Under Siege" (**Learner Guide**, p. 14). Discuss how her faith inspires you and your learners today.
- Direct learners' attention to "Come Thou Long-Expected Jesus" (No. 77, *The Baptist Hymnal*, 1991; No. 176, *Baptist Hymnal*, 2008). Say: *Clearly, Jesus is the "desire of every nation" and the "joy of every longing heart." Unlike any party, family gathering, decoration, musical presentation, or Christmas gift, only Jesus can satisfy and fill the God-shaped vacuum of every human heart.*