



Wonder of the Promise and the Plan.

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BIG IDEA – God made powerful promises and wove the most wonderful, impossible plan through the least likely people and places.

Scripture Focus – Micah 5:2 NLT

But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, are only a small village among all the people of Judah. Yet a ruler of Israel, whose origins are in the distant past, will come from you on my behalf.

The anticipation of Christmas was so overwhelming as a child. For Christmas, I was like Ralphie Parker in the neo-classic, 1983 [A Christmas Story](#). Ralph, played by Peter Billingsley, had an unshakable belief in the wonder of the American Christmas experience. To Ralph, it wasn't just that Christmas was real, it was that Santa was real and if he could just get Santa his Christmas wish, he was absolutely, 100% convinced that Santa would come through for him and grant him his treasured **“official Red Ryder carbine-action, 200-shot range model air rifle with a compass in the stock and this thing that tells time.”**



The writers wanted us to know just how badly Ralph wanted this BB gun, so they had Peter Billingsley scripted to mention it twenty-eight times!



“Twenty-eight: That’s how many times young Ralphie Parker mentions his desire for a Red Ryder BB gun in 1983’s [A Christmas Story](#). For Ralphie, the Red Ryder represents the zenith of the Christmas holiday—a BB-shooting firearm that will help

him manifest the Western heroes of his imagination. To not get the weapon would mean Ralphie would be inconsolable, his life irrevocably ruined. Not even warnings that he would shoot his eye out can dissuade him.” – [Mental Floss article](#)
By Jake Rossen



DIG DEEPER: How the Daisy BB-Gun went from Windmills to a popular toy. **Clarence J. Hamilton originally gave it away as a gift!**

I don't know what your house or your upbringing had as a Christmas culture in your home. Maybe you were raised Jewish, or Jehovah Witness, but I was just a local Long Beach kid living the Christmas wonder of lights, an aluminum tree and presents from Santa Claus. We were not a Christian family so Jesus was not a part of our tradition, even though I somehow knew He started it all.

But oh, how I remember the anticipation of that day.

In our home, we each got one “big gift” along with the traditional orange in the toe of the Christmas stocking and a few necessary mom items like socks or new pajamas. My earliest memory of anticipation almost kept me up on Christmas Eve. My mind racing, listening for Santa Claus, I just couldn't get my mind off what I was getting for Christmas. It might have been the year I begged for a [Rock 'Em Sock 'Em Robots](#) game.



I just knew I had to get to sleep that night, so I went into our bathroom and found a bottle of Nyquil.



There was no “child-safety-cap,” so I filled the little plastic up with the green goo that tasted nasty and drank it down. Nyquil back then contained about 10% alcohol in a 6oz bottle. So, mixed with the other ingredients, I didn't get tipsy, but I crashed so hard that I didn't wake up until about 10 am Christmas morning that year. **I thought I had missed Christmas and just about cried!**

Does anyone remember how intense we were as children about the promises our parents made to us?

At first, we just believed what they said!

Growing old and living life has made us all a little more cynical and skeptical of promises.

Children aren't born with cynicism it is learned. Children come hardwired with *openness, dependence, and expectation*. Cynicism is learned as a protective, defensive posture after disappointment, betrayal, shame, or repeated "letdowns."

Maybe that's another reason when it comes the things of God and the Kingdom of God Jesus said we need to be like a child in both our belief and our trust in Him.

Cynicism says, "I've been disappointed too much to believe."

Wonder says, "But I've also seen enough to trust."

This year I offer that we can rediscover awe of God's Wonder in this season by keeping Christmas more sacred than sacrilegious, more curious than carnal.

Wonder.

Promise spoken, promise secured.

Plan conceived, plan achieved.

As we rediscover the awe and wonder of God's faithfulness at Christmas; and fight to keep the season sacred. We'll look back to see His synchronized plan behind the birth of Jesus. Across millennia of mayhem and global chaos, a rescue plan was conceived before time began and promises were made very long ago. That promise was carried forward by the most unlikely people in one of the most overlooked places on the planet. This Sunday, we'll follow the red thread from Genesis to the manger—and remember why Christmas is still worth our wonder.



The wonder of the promise

God makes his promise to Abram when Abram was 75 years old – he had **ZERO** children! That promise took place [4025 years ago](#)! It was **fulfilled 2025 years ago**. And **we live in that promise right now**, celebrating the season of the coming of Jesus, God's only son.



Genesis 12:1–3 NLT

The LORD had said to Abram, “Leave your native country, your relatives, and your father’s family, and go to the land that I will show you. I will make you into a great nation. I will bless you and make you famous, and you will be a blessing to others. I will bless those who bless you and curse those who treat you with contempt. **All the families on earth will be blessed through you.**”



Isaiah prophesied about a son who would be called God. That promise was fulfilled about 700 years later, in a little town called Bethlehem.

From the time that promise was given to today is about 2725 years ago! And we still live in that promise, that hope that Jesus will rule and reign exactly as Isaiah said, “His government and its peace will never end!”

Isaiah 9:6–7 NLT

For a child is born to us, a son is given to us. The government will rest on his shoulders. And he will be called: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. His government and its peace will never end. He will rule with fairness and justice from the throne of his ancestor David for all eternity. **The passionate commitment of the LORD of Heaven’s Armies will make this happen!**



DIG DEEPER: Lord of Heaven’s Armies

Interesting that Isaiah uses the phrase, “Lord of hosts.” NIV doesn’t even translate it into the English version most read today. KJV & ESV do a better job of translating into the word “hosts.” What are hosts? A few versions, like NLT, try to capture the meaning into a better word that we would understand today, “Lord of **צְבָאוֹת** armies.”

tsābā’ tsābā’ isn’t just about human soldiers.

1. **Angelic hosts** – the “heavenly host” praising God in Luke 2 is exactly that: a military choir announcing the King’s arrival (same word group behind the title).
2. **Human armies** – God is repeatedly shown as the One who truly controls battles and empires, even when pagan kings think they’re in charge.
3. **Cosmic order** – the stars themselves are called “the host of heaven,” marching in their appointed courses under His command.

Why would Isaiah use this word “**tsaba**” **hosts, army, war** to describe God – **the “Yhvh” LORD, GOD of “tsaba” armies?**

Isaiah wants us to see the God behind this promised Child as the cosmic Commander-in-Chief!

We sentimentalize Christmas, but Isaiah militarizes it.

The birth of the Prince of Peace is a **military act of God against darkness.**

The Prince of Peace arrives under the banner of “YHWH of Armies.” Peace is what happens after this God wins.

This is the **wonder of the promise**

- A Child will be born, a Son given, on David’s throne forever. **Humanly impossible.**
- The wonder of the **power behind that promise**
 - It is not “the **goodwill** of people,” but the “**zeal** of YHWH of armies.”
God puts His war-name on the line.
- The wonder of the **paradox** –
 - Title: “YHWH of armies.”
 - Strategy: a baby.
 - Battlefield: a manger, a cross, then an empty tomb.
 - Outcome: peace without end.

Isaiah calls Him “YHWH of armies” so we don’t mistake Christmas for a cute story. The manger is the beachhead of God’s campaign to overthrow sin, Satan, and death—and He brings the hosts of heaven with Him.



DIG DEEPER: I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day

There is a beautiful Christmas carol based on the 1863 poem "Christmas Bells" by American poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. The song tells of the narrator hearing Christmas bells during the American Civil War, but despairing that "hate is strong and mocks the song of peace on earth, good will to men".



It is God and God alone that will bring the finality of peace among men on earth as the annunciation Angel was joined by a “host of others, the armies of heaven. In Luke 2:13-14

Suddenly, the angel was joined by a vast host of others—the armies of heaven—praising God and saying, “Glory to God in highest heaven, and peace on earth to those with whom God is pleased.”

Despite the efforts of humans, God is the one and only who made impossible promises possible for all who would believe and follow His ways!

Don't think for one moment that our lives, our problems, our hurts and our pains are too difficult for God to solve – He is the God of possible!



The Wonder of the Plan

Again, about 700 years before Christ was born in the city of Bethlehem, Micah writes about this ruler rising.



DIG DEEPER: O Little Town of Bethlehem



In the first century Bethlehem was a small (about 300 people) about six miles outside of Jerusalem. It was devout Judean farming and shepherding village, economically tied to Jerusalem and its Temple, but **socially insignificant**.

Bethlehem was small, but a few famous people were connected to it.

- **Rachel's death and tomb.** Rachel dies and is buried "on the way to Ephrath (that is, Bethlehem)" (Gen 35; 48). Her traditional tomb still stands at the northern entrance of Bethlehem.
- **A love story blossomed in Bethlehem!** It is the setting for most of Ruth: **Naomi returns there from Moab, Ruth gleanes in the fields east of town, and Boaz redeems her.** King David's grandfather, Obed (Ruth and Boaz's son) grew up there.
- **David's hometown – "City of David."** Jesse and his sons live in Bethlehem; David is anointed there by Samuel (1 Sam 16). Later Scripture calls Bethlehem the "City of David" in terms of his origins (distinct from Jerusalem, also called City of David after he conquers it). **David's mighty men once break through enemy lines just to draw water from the well of Bethlehem,** showing the town's emotional weight in his story (2 Sam 23).
- **It was one of the cities belonging to the tribe of Judah.**

Tracing the **Christmas thread** through the Old Testament.

In Genesis 49, Jacob is giving his last words to his sons when he says, in verse 10, **"The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from his descendants, until the coming of the one to whom it belongs, the one whom all nations will honor."**

The prophet Nathan promised King David his throne would last forever, **"Your house and your kingdom will continue before me for all time, and your throne will be secure forever."** 2 Samuel 7:16 NLT.

Micah 5:2 NLT

But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, **are only a small village** among all the people of Judah. **Yet a ruler of Israel,** whose origins are in the distant past, **will come from you on my behalf.**

**God chose small and basically insignificant for a purpose:
The greatest King ever comes from a no-name village, not from a palaces or
places of power.**

Bethlehem, as a city, fits the biblical pattern: God chooses the younger brother, a barren (Sarah), a broken (Naomi) and a bawdy (Rahab) woman, the foolish and weak things of the world to shame the strong.

The wonder of God **shows up in nobodies and nowhere** for the meek to overshadow the proud.

At that time the Roman emperor, Augustus, decreed that a census should be taken throughout the Roman Empire. (This was the first census taken when Quirinius was governor of Syria.) All returned to their own ancestral towns to register for this census. **And because Joseph was a descendant of King David, he had to go to Bethlehem in Judea, David's ancient home. He traveled there from the village of Nazareth in Galilee. Luke 2:1-4 NLT**

That night there were shepherds staying in the fields nearby, guarding their flocks of sheep. Suddenly, an angel of the Lord appeared among them, and the radiance of the Lord's glory surrounded them. They were terrified, but the angel reassured them. "Don't be afraid!" he said. "I bring you good news that will bring great joy to all people. **The Savior—yes, the Messiah, the Lord—has been born today in Bethlehem, the city of David!** Luke 2:8-11

O Little Town of Bethlehem becomes significant when:

- **The house of bread births the bread of life.**
- **The fields where sacrificial lambs are raised, yield the Lamb of God who erases our sin.**

Unlike our best plans laid for the best intentions, God's plans are not just perfect, they are pre-ordained. That means that God has the power and might to fulfill each and every detail. Even though many parts of His plan are absolutely miraculous and outside of our understanding, most of the plan is through plain, mundane circumstances that would not stand out as extraordinary or supernatural at all. In fact, they looked simple, normal, not flashy but completely normal for anyone who saw it take place.

Conclusion:

God made powerful promises and wove the most wonderful, impossible plan through the least likely people and places.

He kept those promise then and will keep those yet to come true! He also continues His plan through the most unusual ways and people. Since God has

been faithful in the past, we can trust that He will continue to be faithful now and in the future.

APPLICATION

What little changes can I make in my conversations about this season?

- **Lots of folks believe in a real Christ within Christmas.**
- **Christ must not get lost in our attempts to culturally celebrate the wonder of the season** – even when there's nothing wrong with celebrating with family and friends.
- **It's not just remembering the truth, it's finding ways to celebrate the truth – God keeps His promises and His plans are perfect and trustworthy.**
- Most don't just ask, 'Is it true?' They ask, 'If it's true, what will it require of me?'" That's the issue.
- **I believe the true wonder of Christmas is worth celebrating, what will that require of us?**

What ways can I insert thoughtful discussion in my family about the true nature of wonder in God's promise and plan?

SCRIPTURES

Genesis 12:1–3 NLT ON SCREEN

The LORD had said to Abram, "Leave your native country, your relatives, and your father's family, and go to the land that I will show you. I will make you into a great nation. I will bless you and make you famous, and you will be a blessing to others. I will bless those who bless you and curse those who treat you with contempt. All the families on earth will be blessed through you."

Isaiah 9:6–7 NLT ON SCREEN

For a child is born to us, a son is given to us. The government will rest on his shoulders. And he will be called: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. His government and its peace will never end. He will rule with fairness and justice from the throne of his ancestor David for all eternity. **The passionate commitment of the LORD of Heaven's Armies will make this happen!**

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Suddenly, the angel was joined by a vast host of others—the armies of heaven—praising God and saying, "Glory to God in highest heaven, and peace on earth to those with whom God is pleased."

Genesis 49:10 NLT

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That night there were shepherds staying in the fields nearby, guarding their flocks of sheep. Suddenly, an angel of the Lord appeared among them, and the radiance of the Lord’s glory surrounded them. They were terrified, but the angel reassured them. “Don’t be afraid!” he said. “I bring you good news that will bring great joy to all people. **The Savior—yes, the Messiah, the Lord—has been born today in Bethlehem, the city of David!**”



DIG DEEPER NOTES

[How the Daisy BB-Gun went from Windmills to a popular toy.](#)

At the time, Daisy was considered the market leader in BB guns. The company was founded in 1886 as the Plymouth Iron Windmill Company in Plymouth, Michigan, which distributed steel rather than wood windmills to farmers. (It would relocate to Rogers, Arkansas, in 1958.) With the purchase of a windmill, customers would get a free gift—a metal air rifle made by Clarence J. Hamilton, who had also designed the company’s windmills.

Unfortunately for the windmill company, people seemed far more interested in the gun than the main product. The good news? They were more than capable of meeting that demand. By 1895, the business was renamed Daisy and had set its focus on manufacturing the guns.



O Little Town of Bethlehem

[The Song](#)

The lyrics to "O Little Town of Bethlehem" were written by Phillips Brooks, an American Episcopal priest and hymn writer. In 1865, Brooks traveled to the Holy Land and visited Bethlehem. His visit had a profound impact on him, and he was inspired by the peaceful, humble atmosphere of the town, which was then under Ottoman rule. Brooks had been serving as the rector of the Church of the Holy Trinity in Philadelphia at the time, and he wanted to capture the feeling of the town where Jesus was born. The poem was first published in 1868. It was intended to be part of a Christmas service at the church in Philadelphia, where Brooks was serving. It was originally meant to be a reflection on the birth of Jesus, focusing on themes of peace, humility and hope.

What was Bethlehem like in the first century?

Size

Archaeological work near the Church of the Nativity shows an inhabited village in the time of Jesus, with pottery and domestic remains from the early Roman period. Bible Archaeology Report William F. Albright estimated the population at roughly 300 people when Jesus was born—a tiny place even by ancient standards. [Bible Archaeology Report](#)

Economy

Primarily an agricultural village: terraced fields, olive groves, vineyards, grain. [Church News](#)

Strong shepherding culture: the surrounding hills were used for grazing flocks. Later Jewish tradition and rabbinic sources suggest flocks near Bethlehem supplied sheep for Temple sacrifices in Jerusalem—so a lot of the local economy was tied to raising lambs that would be offered just up the road at the Temple.

[Christian Post](#)

Houses and “mangers”

Excavations show typical stone houses often built against or over caves, with ground-floor spaces or caves used for animals and storage, and living quarters above. Bible Archaeology Report

Stone or plastered mangers (feeding troughs) have been found inside such houses, not just in free-standing stables, which fits Luke's detail that Jesus was laid in a manger without necessarily implying a wooden barn. Bible Archaeology Report

Political backdrop

Bethlehem sat in the shadow of Herodium, Herod the Great's palace-fortress a few miles away—an in-your-face symbol of Roman-backed power overlooking a tiny rural village where Israel's true King is born.

Short version: in the first century Bethlehem was a small, devout Judean farming and shepherding village, economically tied to Jerusalem and its Temple, but socially insignificant.



Lord of Heaven's Armies

Isaiah uses “YHWH of tsaba’” (YHWH of armies/hosts) because he wants you to **see the God behind this promised Child as the cosmic Commander-in-Chief**—the divine Warrior whose power, resources, and rule cannot be challenged. The war-language is deliberate, not accidental.

1. What does *tsābā’* actually mean?

The Hebrew noun **צָבָא** (*tsābā’*) carries the idea of:

- an **organized army** or **host**,
- engaged in **warfare or service**,
- moving in **ordered ranks** to accomplish a mission.

It's used in several ways:

1. Literal **human armies** (Israel or other nations).
2. **Heavenly armies** – angels, the “host of heaven.”
3. Even the **stars and heavenly bodies** seen as God's ordered “host.”

When we read **YHWH *tsēbā’ōt*** (“LORD of hosts / armies”), **you should not picture a small local deity, but the God who commands:**

- **heaven's angelic forces,**
 - **earth's armies (whether they realize it or not),**
 - **and the entire ordered creation.**
-

2. Why does Isaiah use “YHWH of hosts” in 9:7?

Isaiah 9:6–7 is stacking titles on this Child: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Then Isaiah closes verse 7 with:

“The **zeal of YHWH of hosts** will do this.”

In context, Isaiah is doing several things with that title.

a) He's presenting God as the Divine Warrior-King

Isaiah (and other prophets) regularly use “YHWH of hosts” when God is:

- confronting nations,
- judging evil,
- or defending His people.

This isn't a soft, vague “God is nice” title. It's a declaration that:

The God who commands the armies of heaven and earth is personally committed to making this promise happen.

b) He's answering the obvious question: “Who can pull this off?”

Isaiah 9:7 piles up impossibles:

- an ever-increasing government,
- peace that doesn't end,
- justice and righteousness forever on David's throne.

The obvious objection: “Who on earth can make that stick?”

Isaiah's answer: **no one on earth.**

It will be done by the **zeal of YHWH tsēbā 'ōt**—the God who:

- commands angel armies,
- overrules empires,
- and is not negotiating with evil but overthrowing it.

3. Why use war/army language for a “Prince of Peace”?

That tension is the point.

Isaiah 9 itself starts with war imagery—oppression, boots of warriors, blood-soaked garments—and then says all that will be burned as fuel for the fire (9:5). Peace doesn't come because evil politely retires; it comes because God defeats it.

So “YHWH of hosts” in a “peace” passage tells you:

- **Peace is the result of victory**, not compromise.
- The baby in the manger is backed by the **armies of heaven.**
- Christmas is **God's invasion**, not a Hallmark moment.

4. What “hosts” does God actually command?

tsābā' isn't just about human soldiers.

1. **Angelic hosts** – the “heavenly host” praising God in Luke 2 is exactly that: a military choir announcing the King’s arrival (same word group behind the title).
2. **Human armies** – God is repeatedly shown as the One who truly controls battles and empires, even when pagan kings think they’re in charge.
3. **Cosmic order** – the stars themselves are called “the host of heaven,” marching in their appointed courses under His command.

So “YHWH of hosts” = the One in charge of **every** power structure—seen and unseen. When He sets His zeal on sending and establishing the Messiah, the outcome is not in doubt.



[I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day](#) –

"I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day" is a Christmas carol based on the 1863 poem "Christmas Bells" by American poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. The song tells of the narrator hearing Christmas bells during the American Civil War, but despairing that "hate is strong and mocks the song of peace on earth, good will to men". After much anguish and despondency, the carol concludes with the bells ringing out with resolution that "God is not dead, nor doth He sleep" and that there will ultimately be "peace on earth, good will to men".

I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day
Their old familiar carols play,
And wild and sweet the words repeat
Of peace on earth, good will to men.
I thought how, as the day had come,
The belfries of all Christendom
Had rolled along the unbroken song
Of peace on earth, good will to men.
And in despair I bowed my head:
“There is no peace on earth,” I said,
“For hate is strong and mocks the song
Of peace on earth, good will to men.”
Then pealed the bells more loud and deep:
“God is not dead, nor doth he sleep;
The wrong shall fail, the right prevail,
With peace on earth, good will to men.”
Till, ringing singing, on its way,
The world revolved from night to day,
A voice, a chime, a chant sublime,
Of peace on earth, good will to men!
