

## MICAH 5:1[2]<sup>1</sup> – BETHLEHEM: THE MESSIAH'S BIRTHPLACE?<sup>2</sup>

### I. INTRODUCTION

In the opening verse of the second chapter in the Gospel of Matthew, its author declares that Bethlehem was the birthplace of Jesus:

**Matthew 2:1(KJV) – Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, ...**

The author then claims this event to have been the "fulfillment" of a prophecy in the Hebrew Bible, stating:

**Matthew 2:5-6(KJV) – (5) And they said unto him, In Bethlehem of Judaea: for thus it is written by the prophet, (6) And thou Bethlehem, in the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda: for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel.**

According to annotated Christian bibles, such as the New American Standard Bible [NASB]<sup>3</sup>, Matthew 2:6 points to Micah 5:2 in the Christian "Old Testament", which corresponds to Micah 5:1 in the Hebrew Scriptures. Hence, Micah 5:1[2] has become a significant "proof text" in the Christian missionary's portfolio.

A rigorous analysis of the Hebrew text in Micah 5:1 demonstrates that the attempted application of this verse in the New Testament, and its subsequent mistranslation in the Christian "Old Testament", are inconsistent with what the Hebrew Bible teaches.

### II. COMPARISON OF TRANSLATIONS, AND THE APPLICATION IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Table II-1 shows side-by-side English renditions of the verse Micah 5:1[2], the verse Matthew 2:6 from the New Testament, as well as the corresponding verse from the

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<sup>1</sup> The notation Micah 5:1[2] shows the verse number from the Hebrew Bible first, followed by the corresponding verse number from the Christian "Old Testament" shown in brackets.

<sup>2</sup> Transliterations of Hebrew terminology into the Latin alphabet will follow these guidelines:

- Transliterated terminology is shown in ***bold italicized*** font
- The accented syllable in transliterated terminology is shown in ***SMALL CAPS*** font
- Latin vowel-sounds, A – E – I – O – U, are used (not the English versions thereof!)
- Distinct Hebrew letter that have ambiguous Latin letter sounds are transliterated according to the following rules:
  - A vocalized letter א is transliterated as the equivalent Latin vowel
  - A vocalized letter י is transliterated as the equivalent Latin vowel with an added underscore
  - The letter ה is transliterated as "h"
  - The letter ח is transliterated as "ch"
  - The letter כ is transliterated as "k"
  - The letter ק is transliterated as "q"
  - A vocalized **SHVA** (וְ אֵי) is transliterated as a superscripted "e" following the consonant
  - There is no "doubling" of letters in the transliterations to reflect the **dagesh** (emphasis)

<sup>3</sup> The NASB, among many other Christian bible versions, is available on the Bible Gateway - <http://www.biblegateway.com/>

Hebrew Bible, Micah 5:1. Matthew 2:6 is included since it contains the alleged quote from Micah 5:1[2].

**Table II-1 – Comparing Matthew 2:6 with Micah 5:1[2]**

| King James Version New Testament  | King James Version "Old Testament"   | Jewish Translation from the Hebrew  | Hebrew Text  |
|---|--|---|--|
| <b>Matthew 2:6</b>  | <b>Micah 5:2</b>   | <b>Micah 5:1</b>  | מיכה ה, א  |
| And thou Bethlehem, in the land of Juda, art <b>not</b> the least among the princes of Juda: for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel. | But 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. | And you, [of] Bethlehem [of] Efrat, who were to be insignificant among the thousands of Judah, from you [he] shall emerge for Me, to be a ruler over Israel; and his origin is from old, from ancient days. | וְאַתָּה בֵּית-לְחֶם אֶפְרַתָּה צְעִיר לְהִיּוֹת בְּאַלְפֵי יְהוּדָה מִמֶּדָּ לִי יֵצֵא לְהִיּוֹת מוֹשֵׁל בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל וּמוֹצְאָתוֹ מִקְדָּם מִימֵי עוֹלָם: |

Aside from the fact that Matthew 2:6 is, at best, a paraphrase of the quoted portion of the source verse, of which the last phrase was completely left out, the rendition of Micah 5:2 in the KJV is problematic. These issues, which involve the highlighted phrases in the respective texts, are addressed in the analysis.

### III. ANALYSIS OF THE PASSAGE

The Jewish translation of Micah 5:1 is separated into the following two segments in order to facilitate the analysis:

#### Segment A

**Micah 5:1A** – And you, [of] Bethlehem [of] Efrat, who were to be insignificant among the thousands of Judah, from you [he] shall emerge for Me, to be a ruler over Israel;

#### Segment B

**Micah 5:1B** – and his origin is from old, from ancient days.

#### A. Analysis of Segment A

The main object of analyzing this portion of the verse is to identify whom the prophet may be addressing here. The loss of various gender distinctions in the process of translating this passage from Hebrew into English makes it nearly impossible to obtain a correct identification when using an English translation without also studying the Hebrew text.

**Micah 5:1A** – And you, [of] Bethlehem [of] Efrat, who were to be insignificant among the thousands of Judah, from you [he] shall emerge for Me, to be a ruler over Israel;

The opening phrase in the verse, וְאַתָּה בֵּית-לְחֶם אֶפְרַתָּה (v<sup>e</sup>ATAH BEIT-LEhem efratah), starts with the word וְאַתָּה (v<sup>e</sup>ATAH), which is a combination of וְ (v<sup>e</sup>), the conjunction **and**, and אַתָּה (ATAH), the pronoun **you** for the 2<sup>nd</sup>-person,

singular, *masculine* gender, and which also is the noun in this case. Thus, אַתָּה (v<sup>e</sup>ATAH) translates as **and you**, in the 2<sup>nd</sup>-person, singular, *masculine* gender.

Following the word אַתָּה is the phrase בֵּית־לֶחֶם אֶפְרַתָּה (BEIT-LEHEM eFRATAH). The term אֶפְרַתָּה (eFRATAH) is used in the Hebrew Bible in several ways:

- ☆ אֶפְרַתָּה is the name of a place, אֶפְרַת (eFRAT), to which the syllable הַ (ah) had been appended. The appendage of the syllable הַ to the name of a place in the Hebrew Bible most often is equivalent to adding the proposition “to” to the name, i.e., **to [name of the place]**; thus, אֶפְרַתָּה would translate as **to Efrat** (e.g., at Genesis 35:16,19, 48:7; similar cases occur for other cities, such as Jerusalem [e.g., at 2Chronicles 32:9], Hebron [e.g., at 2Samuel 5:1], as well as other places that are not necessarily where people live, such as a well [e.g., at Genesis 24:16]).
- ☆ In some cases, the appended syllable הַ has the effect of adding the preposition “of/from” to the name, i.e., **of/from [name of the place]**. In this case, אֶפְרַתָּה would translate as **of/from Efrat** (e.g., at 1Chronicles 2:24, where בְּכָל־בְּרָתָהּ אֶפְרַתָּה (b<sup>e</sup>chALEV eFRATAH), translates as **in Calev of Efrat**). This application suggests the possibility that Efrat may have also been the name of a district or region, such as a metropolis or township, which included other places in addition to Efrat itself, as the following verse may indicate:

**Ruth 4:11** - And all the people who were in the gate and the elders replied, "[We are] witnesses! May the Lord make the woman who is entering your house like Rachel and like Leah, both of whom built up the House of Israel; and [may you] prosper in Ephrathah and be famous in Bethlehem.

- ☆ It is the name of a place, a city, also called אֶפְרַת, which is another name for the city of בֵּית־לֶחֶם, **Bethlehem**, as the common translations of the following verse may indicate:

**Genesis 48:7** - As for me, when I came from Padan, Rachel died on me in the land of Canaan on the way, when there was still a stretch of land to go to Efrat, and I buried her there on the way to Efrat, which is Bethlehem. (See also Genesis 35:19.)

**Sidebar Note:** There could be an issue here with the manner in which the Hebrew in this verse, as well as in Genesis 35:19, is read and understood, which may impact the translation as well. One can quite easily understand this verse to read in the following manner:

**Genesis 48:7** - As for me, when I came from Padan, Rachel died on me in the land of Canaan on the way, when there was still a stretch of land to go to Efrat, and I buried her **there** on the way to Efrat, **which is [in] Bethlehem**.

The original verse unambiguously states that Jacob buried Rachel at some point, characterized in the verse as “there”, which was still some distance from Efrat itself. Therefore, the last phrase could easily be understood as referring to the place where Jacob buried Rachel.

If this argument is valid, it could actually change the claim that these two names refer to the same place.

In the Hebrew language, which has no neuter gender (i.e., there is no Hebrew equivalent to the English pronoun **it**), cities and towns are assigned the feminine gender. This is also the case, *without exceptions*, for any city or town mentioned in the Hebrew Bible. It is important to recognize the distinction between a geographical patch of real-estate that bears the name of a city or town and its inhabitants, since there are instances in the Hebrew Bible where the population of a city or town is referred to by the name of that place, but in a masculine gender, which could appear to someone who may not be sufficiently proficient in the Hebrew language as if the city or town itself were referred to in the masculine gender [e.g., Isaiah 3:8, Ezekiel 25:9, 38:6, Amos 5:5, Micah 1:11]. The use of the pronoun אַתָּה, [singular, masculine] **you**, would not be an issue in this case since, in the Hebrew Bible, singular pronouns, such as אַתָּה, are applied in both the singular and plural context (e.g., Exodus 33:3).

The phrase בַּיְת־לְחָם אֶפְרָתָה is an example of an *appositive*, an element of a sentence that further identifies the noun – אַתָּה in this case, which is the [singular, masculine] pronoun **you** – yet cities and towns are feminine objects. Therefore, this phrase *cannot* refer to a city or town.<sup>4</sup>

The next phrase, צָעִיר לְהָיוֹת בְּאַלְפֵי יְהוּדָה, (*tsa'IR liHYOT b<sup>e</sup>alFEI y<sup>e</sup>HUDAH*), is an *adjective clause*, which is a clause that describes the noun. The first term in this phrase, צָעִיר (*tsa'IR*), is a masculine adjective (it can also serve as a noun), the feminine counterpart of which is צְעִירָה (*ts<sup>e</sup>IRAH*). This adjective (noun) is used in the Hebrew Bible *exclusively* in reference to people, *never* in reference to places. Its most common application is in referring to **a young person** (e.g., Jeremiah 14:3, Job 32:6) and to the **younger of two persons** (e.g., Genesis 29:26). This term is also used in the Hebrew Bible as a metaphor to describe **persons who are of lower rank or stature, insignificant, or lowly** relative to others (e.g., 1Samuel 9:21, Psalms 119:141).

The word צָעִיר is followed by the expression בְּאַלְפֵי יְהוּדָה (*b<sup>e</sup>alFEI y<sup>e</sup>HUDAH*). The Hebrew word אֶלֶף (*Elef*), **a thousand**, appears in this expression in a plural possessive construct, namely, אֲלָפִי (*alFEI*), **thousands of ...**, combined with the preposition בְּ- (*b<sup>e</sup>-*), **among, in, within**, so that the expression translates as **among the thousands of ...**. Recall how Moses divided the Israelites into groups of thousands, first according to their tribal affiliation and then by clans, over which he placed “**captains of thousands**” [שָׂרֵי אֲלָפִים (*sarei alafim*)], and further divided each thousand into subgroups of hundreds, over which he placed “**captains of hundreds**” [שָׂרֵי מֵאוֹת (*sarei mei'ot*)] (see Exodus 18:25). According to accounts in the Hebrew Bible, such divisions remained in place for the Kingdom of Israel through King Solomon's reign (see 2Chronicles 1:2), and

<sup>4</sup> If it were the town of Bethlehem being addressed in Micah 5:1, the opening term would have been אַתָּתְךָ (*v<sup>e</sup>AT*), **and you**, in the 2<sup>nd</sup>-person, singular, feminine gender, such as at Jeremiah 3:1 and elsewhere.

for the Kingdom of Judah at least through King Amaziah's reign (see 2Chronicles 25:5). The Hebrew Bible contains 28 references to the “captains of thousands” and ten applications of the plural possessive construct אֲלָפִי that *could* be understood to relate to the groups of “thousands” among Israel, the latter of which are shown in Table III.A-1 along with their common Jewish translations and KJV translations [the phrases shown in the brackets are included to help with the context].

**Table III.A-1 – Applications of אֲלָפִי relative to the groups of “thousands” among Israel**

| Hebrew         | Pronunciation                              | Reference            | Common Jewish Translation                | KJV Translation                           |
|----------------|--|----------------------|--|---|
| אֲלָפִי        | <i>alPI</i>                                | Judges 6:15          | my thousand [is the poorest in Menasseh] | my family [is poor in Manasseh]           |
| אֲלָפִי        | <i>alFEI</i>                               | Numbers 1:16         | [the heads of the] thousands of [Israel] | [heads of] thousands in [Israel]          |
|                |  | Numbers 10:4         | [the leaders of Israel's] thousands      | [heads of the] thousands of [Israel]      |
|                |  | Joshua 22:21         | [the heads of the] thousands of [Israel] | [the heads of the] thousands of [Israel]  |
|                |  | Joshua 22:30         | [the heads of the] thousands of [Israel] | [heads of the] thousands of [Israel]      |
|                |  | 1Samuel 23:23        | [among the] thousands of [Judah]         | [throughout all the] thousands of [Judah] |
| בְּאֲלָפֵי     | <i>b<sup>e</sup>alFEI</i>                  | <b>Micah 5:1[2]*</b> | <b>among the thousands of [Judah]</b>    | <b>among the thousands of [Judah]</b>     |
| לְאֲלָפֵי      | <i>l<sup>a</sup>alFEI</i>                  | Joshua 22:14         | among the thousands of [Israel]          | among the thousands of [Israel]           |
| מֵאֲלָפֵי      | <i>m<sup>e</sup>alFEI</i>                  | Numbers 31:5         | from the thousands of [Israel]           | out of the thousands of [Israel]          |
| וּלְאֲלָפֵיכֶם | <i>u<sup>l</sup>a<sup>l</sup>alfeICHEM</i> | 1Samuel 10:19        | and by your thousands                    | and by your thousands                     |

\* - This case is included here conditionally for the benefit of the discussion that follows.

The analysis presented thus far is sufficient to develop several possible scenarios to describe whom Micah might be addressing in the opening verse.

## 1. Who is being addressed by Micah?

### Scenario 1

One possibility is that Micah is addressing the inhabitants of the city בֵּית-לְחֶם, **Bethlehem**. The added reference to **Efrat** could help identify the city as the one located in the territory of Judah so as to distinguish it from another Bethlehem located in the territory of Zebulun (see Joshua 19:15), though it is superfluous as seen from the rest of **Segment A**. The inhabitants of בֵּית-לְחֶם may have comprised one of those groups of “thousands” in the Hebrew Bible, one that had a low status among the other “thousands” in the Tribe of Judah. Yet, in spite of its insignificance, Micah prophesies that out of this “thousand” מָשִׁיחַ (*mashi'ah*), the promised **Jewish Messiah**, will emerge.

A drawback of this scenario is that the population of בֵּית־לֶחֶם probably was large enough to comprise more than one such clan of a “thousand”.

## Scenario 2

A second possibility is that a certain clan from **Efrat**, i.e., a group of families that trace their lines of decent to a common ancestor, is being addressed here. In Hebrew, the name בֵּית־לֶחֶם (*BEIT-LEhem*) literally means [the] **House of Lehem** [לֶחֶם (*LEhem*) means **bread**, or (generic) **food**]. Thus, the title בֵּית־לֶחֶם may refer to a clan by that name who resides in **Efrat**. The members of this clan may have comprised one of the groups of “thousands” but, again, one that had a low status among the other “thousands” in the Tribe of Judah. Here, too, Micah prophesies that, in spite of its insignificance, מְשִׁיחַ will emerge out of this clan.

This scenario draws support from the fact that members of a clan or a family are referred to by the name of their clan or family, names that often derive from the names of their respective progenitors, as the following example demonstrates:

**Numbers 3:19,27 – (19) And the sons of Kohath** according to their families were **Amram, Itzhar, Hebron, and Uziel.**  
**(27) And of Kohath, the Amramite family, and the Izharite family, and the Hebronite family, and the Uzzielite family; these are the Kohathite families.**

This may also be seen regarding the **Bethlehemite clan** [בֵּית־הַלְחָמִי (*BEIT-ha'lahmi*)] in the following example:

**1Samuel 16:1 - And the Lord said to Samuel, "Until when will you mourn for Saul, that I have rejected him from reigning over Israel? Fill your horn with oil, and go, I will send you to Jesse the Bethlehemite [בֵּית־הַלְחָמִי], for I have found among his sons a king for Me.**

By slightly changing its common English translation, the following verse could demonstrate this even more explicitly:

**1Samuel 17:12 - And David was the son of this Ephratite man [אֶפְרַתִּי (*efrati*)] from the House of Lehem [מִבֵּית־לֶחֶם (*mi'BEIT-LEhem*)] of Judah, whose name was Jesse, and he had eight sons; and the man, who was elderly in Saul's time, was among the [respected] men.**

A drawback of this scenario is that no person named לֶחֶם is mentioned anywhere in the Hebrew Bible. One would expect that, if there was a clan named בֵּית־לֶחֶם – one that was destined to become so significant in Israel – the name of its progenitor would have been mentioned somewhere in the Hebrew Bible.

### Scenario 3

A third possibility is similar to the one described above in Scenario 2, except that here Micah addresses some unnamed group of people, perhaps a clan that hails from **בֵּית־לָחָם** and either comprised or was part of a “thousand”, one that had a low status among the other “thousands” in the Tribe of Judah. Once again, as in the previous two scenarios, Micah prophesies that **מְשִׁיחַ** will emerge out of this clan even though it was lowly.

This scenario suffers from a drawback that is similar to that noted for Scenario 2. Namely, that a clan of a “thousand”, or a group of people within it, destined for future greatness, is being addressed anonymously.

### Scenario 4

Lastly, it is possible that being addressed here is a particular individual whose ancestors, and he himself, hail from **בֵּית־לָחָם**. This person was insignificant in his youth, but was the one whom God selected to be the king of Israel and the progenitor of the royal lineage out of which **מְשִׁיחַ** would eventually emerge.

In spite of the apparent anonymity, several accounts found elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible fit into the characterization provided by Micah and help identify this special individual. This person turns out to be David, who was the one son that Jesse regarded the least when God dispatched Samuel to find and anoint the next king of Israel:

**1Samuel 16:1,6-12** – (1) And the Lord said to Samuel, "Until when are you mourning for Saul, when I have rejected him from reigning over Israel? Fill your horn with oil, and come, I shall send you to Jesse, the Bethlehemite, for I have seen for Myself a king among his sons." (6) And it was, that when they came, and he saw **Eliab**, that he said, "Surely, before the Lord is His anointed." (7) And the Lord said to Samuel, "Look not upon his appearance, or the height of his stature, for I have rejected him, for it is not as man sees, [that which is visible] to the eyes, while the Lord sees into the heart." (8) And Jesse called to **Abinadab**, and he presented him before Samuel, and he said, "Neither has the Lord chosen this one." (9) And Jesse presented **Shammah**, and he said, "Neither has the Lord chosen this one." (10) And **Jesse presented seven of his sons before Samuel**; and Samuel said to Jesse, "The Lord has not chosen these." (11) And Samuel said to Jesse, "**Are these all the young men?**" And he said, "**The youngest still remains, and behold, he is tending the sheep.**" And Samuel said to Jesse, "Send and bring him, for we shall not sit down until he comes here." (12) And **he sent and brought him**, and he was ruddy, with beautiful eyes, and handsome appearance. And the Lord said, "**Arise, anoint him, for this is he.**"

Eventually, the aging King David was visited by the Prophet Nathan who conveyed to him God’s promise of an everlasting dynasty, of which he was to be the progenitor, a dynasty that will eventually produce **מְשִׁיחַ**:

**2Samuel 7:12-16** – (12) When your days are fulfilled, and you shall lie with your forefathers, then I will raise up your seed that shall issue from your body after you, and I will establish his kingdom. (13) He shall build a house for My Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. (14) I will be to him a father, and he shall be to Me a son; so that when he goes astray I will chasten him with the rod of men, and with afflictions of human beings. (15) And My mercy shall not depart from him; in the manner in which I withdrew it from Saul, whom I removed from before you. (16) And your house and your kingdom shall be established forever before you; your throne shall be established forever.

All four scenarios presented above are, in principle, plausible, though Scenario 4 provides the best “fit” with the written text. However, for the purpose of this essay, it is not necessary to further analyze these scenarios.

The analysis of **Segment A** has demonstrated, first and foremost, that the Prophet Micah is directing a prophetic message at a person (or a group of persons) who hailed from Bethlehem, not at a parcel of land that bears the name of the city, in which he foretells that the royal line that originated in Bethlehem will eventually produce מְשִׁיחַ. Nothing is said about מְשִׁיחַ being born in Bethlehem!

By contrast, the KJV translation uses Micah 5:2 to create a different prophetic scenario wherein the city of Bethlehem, in spite of being a small and insignificant place in the territory of Judah (for which no reason is given), will be the birthplace of the Christian Messiah. Most other Christian translations do the same thing.

## B. Analysis of **Segment B**

**Micah 5:1B** – and his origin is from old, from ancient days.

The fact that **Segment A** of Micah 5:1 actually voids the positive identification (in the New Testament) of Bethlehem as the (Christian) Messiah’s birthplace, created a serious problem for Christianity, one that is compounded by the Hebrew closing phrase of **Segment B**, מִיָּמֵי עוֹלָם (*mi’y’MEI OLAM*), **from ancient days**.

Micah, a contemporary of the prophets Amos, Hosea, and Isaiah, and of King Hezekiah (around 730 B.C.E.), said something special here, namely, that the **origin** of מְשִׁיחַ would be from Bethlehem, from the long ago past, **from ancient days**. However, this statement conflicts with Christian theology, since Jesus is considered as having existed from the beginning of time, from before Creation, and the phrase “**from ancient days**” does not satisfy this criterion. In order to “fix” this problem, many Christian translators simply replace the correct phrase, “ancient days”, with phrases such as “days of eternity”, “everlasting”, or “days of time indefinite”.

*Who is telling the truth?* The Hebrew phrase מִיָּמֵי עוֹלָם (*y<sup>e</sup>MEI OLAM*), **ancient days**, is used at Micah 5:1 with the preposition מִ (*mi-*), **from**, as מִיָּמֵי עוֹלָם. All six instances of the expression מִיָּמֵי עוֹלָם in the Hebrew Bible, including its

combinations with prepositions, are shown in Table III.B-1, along with their correct renditions and their renditions in the KJV.

**Table III.B-1 – The expression יְמֵי עוֹלָם in the Hebrew Bible**

| Hebrew            | Pronunciation           | Reference                                | Correct Translation | KJV Rendition         |
|-------------------|-------------------------|--|---------------------|-----------------------|
| יְמֵי עוֹלָם      | y <sup>o</sup> MEI OLAM | Isaiah 63:9,11                           | the days of old     | the days of old       |
| כִּי־יְמֵי עוֹלָם | kiy'MEI OLAM            | Amos 9:11;<br>Micah 7:14;<br>Malachi 3:4 | as in days of old   | as in the days of old |
| מִיְמֵי עוֹלָם    | miy'MEI OLAM            | Micah 5:1[2]                             | from ancient days   | from everlasting      |

The KJV correctly translates this expression in five out of the six cases as “days of old”, which is synonymous with “ancient days”, but at Micah 5:2 the KJV renders it as “from everlasting”.

*What could have motivated the KJV translators to change the translation at Micah 5:2, which speaks of the Messiah? A likely answer is that, by substituting “from everlasting” for “from ancient days”, the KJV translators attempted to bring this “Old Testament” prophecy into “harmony” with the accounts in the New Testament and with Christian theology. Could this be another example of “pious fraud” committed by some Christian authors?*

For the sake of completeness and fairness, it should be noted that, in contrast to the KJV (and several other Christian bibles), some Christian translations have the correct renditions of this phrase (e.g., New American Bible [NAB], New International Version [NIV], New Revised Standard Version [NRSV], and The New Jerusalem Bible, among others).

### C. What’s wrong with Matthew 2:6?

As was demonstrated above, the phrase “from ancient days” brings the reader back to King David and his ancestors, and this created a serious theological problem for Christianity. It was also shown how the KJV translators attempted to “solve” this problem in their rendition of Micah 5:2. The author of the Gospel of Matthew apparently recognized this problem as he was attempting to construct a cohesive message, and his creative way of dealing with the true context of Micah 5:1[2] was to simply restate his own version of this verse:

**Matthew 2:6(KJV) – And thou Bethlehem, in the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda: for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel.**

Table III.C-1 shows a word-by-word (or, as appropriate, phrase-by-phrase) comparison of the four texts shown in Table II-1 at the beginning of this essay along with related comments on any discrepancies relative to the Hebrew text. [The notations [M] and [F] indicate the respective genders – masculine and feminine – in the Hebrew text. The notation [N] indicates a term that is gender-

neutral, such as the infinitive of a verb in lines 5 and 11, and the preposition inflected in the 1<sup>st</sup>-person singular in line 9, of the table.]

**Table III.C-1 – Word-by-word comparison of the texts**

| #  | Matthew 2:6 (KJV)  | Micah 5:2 (KJV)  | Micah 5:1 (Jewish)        | מיכה ה,א            |
|----|--|--|---------------------------|---------------------|
| 1  | And thou   | <i>But</i> thou (different; “But” replaces “And”)            | And you [of]              | [M] ואתָּה          |
| 2  | Bethlehem  | Bethlehem  | Bethlehem                 | [F] בֵּית-לְחֶם     |
| 3  | <i>in the land of Juda (different)</i>                     | Ephratah   | [of] Efrat                | [F] אֶפְרַתָּה      |
| 4  | <i>not the least (different; note reversal of context)</i> | <i>little (different; can apply to people and places)</i>    | Insignificant [person(s)] | [M] צָעִיר          |
| 5  | <i>art (different; change of context)</i>                  | though thou be   | who were to be            | [N] לְהִיּוֹת       |
| 6  | among the princes of                                       | among the thousands of                                       | among the thousands of    | [M] בְּאַלְפֵי      |
| 7  | Juda   | Judah  | Judah                     | [M] יְהוּדָה        |
| 8  | for out of thee  | yet out of thee  | from you                  | [M] מִמֶּךָ         |
| 9  | <i>(completely left out)</i>                               | unto me  | for Me                    | [N] לִי             |
| 10 | shall come   | shall he come forth  | [he] shall emerge         | [M] יֵצֵא           |
| 11 | <i>(completely left out)</i>                               | that is to be  | to be                     | [N] לְהִיּוֹת       |
| 12 | <i>a Governor (different; note the “G”)</i>                | ruler  | a ruler                   | [M] מוֹשֵׁל         |
| 13 | that shall rule my people Israel                           | in Israel  | over Israel               | [M] בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל   |
| 14 | <i>(completely left out)</i>                               | whose goings forth have been                                 | and his origin is         | [M] וּמוֹצְאֹתָיו   |
| 15 | <i>(completely left out)</i>                               | from of old  | from old                  | [M] מִקְדָּם        |
| 16 | <i>(completely left out)</i>                               | <i>from everlasting (different; note change in timeline)</i> | from ancient days         | [M] מִיָּמֵי עוֹלָם |

With the help of several “editorial” changes, as shown in the column for Matthew 2:6, **Segment A** was rather easily transformed into a passage that could show Bethlehem as being the Messiah’s birthplace. This made it “line up” with the rest of the story that the author of the Gospel of Matthew wanted to convey.

**Segment B**, on the other hand, is disastrous to Christian theology, which called for “radical surgery” by the author of the Gospel of Matthew – he completely eliminated this problematic part of Micah 5:1[2] from Matthew 2:6. After all, had he included some modified version of **Segment B**, it may have drawn the reader to the person who lived some 200-300 years prior to Micah on the historical timeline, to King David, as the progenitor of the lineage from which the Messiah would emerge. That would have eliminated Jesus’ divinity at the very least!

Once these changes were made, the resulting passage, Matthew 2:6, appeared to be, and is claimed as being, one of several hundred prophecies in the Christian “Old Testament” that has been fulfilled by Jesus per the accounts in the

New Testament. Yet, given the analysis presented above, how can any honest reader accept this sort of manipulation at face value?

#### IV. **NEWS FLASH!!! ANOTHER BETHLEHEM**

Archaeological evidence has recently been reported, in which another, more likely, birthplace of Jesus was identified.<sup>5</sup> Aviram Oshri, a senior archaeologist with the Israeli Antiquities Authority, has been excavating in the area of an Israeli village called **Beit Lehem haGalilit, Bethlehem of the Galilee**, which is located a few miles west of Nazareth. This Bethlehem is mentioned in the Hebrew Bible as being in the territory of the Tribe of Zebulun, which included the lower Galilee (see Joshua 19:15). From his findings, Oshri concludes that Jesus was born in Bethlehem of the Galilee, not in Bethlehem of Judea.

The prospect of Jesus being born in the Galilee rather than in Judea creates serious problems for Christian theology in general, and for the claim of Jesus being from the "House of David" in particular, since Bethlehem of the Galilee was not part of Judea.

A more detailed analysis on the archaeological findings at Bethlehem of the Galilee and their possible implications to Christian beliefs appears in another essay.<sup>6</sup>

#### V. **SUMMARY**

*Is Micah 5:1[2] a prophecy that בְּיַשׁוּבֵי will be born in Bethlehem (of Judea)?* The Christian claim is that Jesus fulfilled this prophecy by being born in Bethlehem of Judea. As was demonstrated in the analysis presented herein, Bethlehem of Judea was the town from which King David's family originated, and this prophecy speaks of this city as the place where the messianic royal line originated, though not necessarily the birthplace of בְּיַשׁוּבֵי. This passage is all about King David's ancestry, with בְּיַשׁוּבֵי being but a future "by-product" of it. It is interesting to note, and somewhat surprising, that the translators of *The New Jerusalem Bible* (a Christian bible translated and used by the Roman Catholic Church) confirm this in a footnote to the verse Micah 5:2 (emphasis added by me):

Ephratha (to which Micah apparently attaches the etymological meaning of "fruitful", connecting it with the birth of the liberator) originally indicated a clan related to Caleb, 1 Ch 2:19,24,50, and settled in the district of Bethlehem, Rt 1:2; 1 S 17:12; the name later came to be used for the town itself, Gn 35:19; 48:7; Jos15:59; Rt 4:11, hence the gloss in the text. Micah is thinking of the ancient origin of the dynasty of David, Rt 4:11,17,18-22; 1 S 17:12. The evangelists later interpreted this passage as a prophecy of Christ's birthplace.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Aviram Oshri, "Where Was Jesus Born?", *Archaeology*, Volume 58, No. 6, Nov/Dec 2005, pp. 42-45.

[Abstract of article is available at - <http://www.archaeology.org/0511/abstracts/jesus.html>]

<sup>6</sup> *O Little Town of Bethlehem ... (of Galilee)* - <http://thejewishhome.org/counter/galilee.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> The New Jerusalem Bible, p. 1551, Doubleday (1985)

In other words, while this passage does not rule out Bethlehem of Judea from being the birthplace of the Messiah, as could be any other place, the notion that it is his birthplace was introduced later, in the New Testament, as an interpretation by the Gospel writers.

Since the KJV translation of the Hebrew Bible came many centuries after the Gospel of Matthew was written, the only option available to the Christian translators for "harmonizing" Micah 5:1[2] with Christian theology and Matthew 2:6 was to suitably alter the context of the source verse. The discrepancies that exist between Matthew 2:6 and Micah 5:2 (in the Christian "Old Testament") are not likely to be noticed by most Christians since they generally study the New Testament first, which is where their theological ideas become well established. By the time they proceed to study the Christian "Old Testament" to "check out" these alleged prophecies of which the accounts of fulfillment have already been studied, those issues become rather transparent.

It is also worth noting that, relative to the few attributes of מְשִׁיחַ actually spelled out in the Hebrew Bible, which Jesus did not fulfill in any event, being born in Bethlehem of Judea, even if it were true, would be inconsequential.

Moreover, the rest of the fifth chapter of Micah proves that Jesus cannot be the subject of the prophecy in Micah 5:1[2]. Micah 5:2[3] speaks of the return of the Jewish people to Israel during the lifetime of the prophesied ruler. The historical record shows that such repatriation of Israel did not take place during the lifetime of Jesus. Then, Micah 5:4-5[5-6] gives an account of this ruler leading Israel in a successful war against its enemies. The historical record shows not only that Jesus never lead Israel in battle, he never ruled over Israel in the first place.

Finally, as the recently reported archaeological findings suggest, if Jesus was born in Bethlehem, he was born in Bethlehem of the Galilee, not in Bethlehem of Judea. So, even if this prophecy were to identify Bethlehem (of Judea) as the Messiah's place of birth, that prophecy would also not have been fulfilled by Jesus.