

Jewish Rabbis Believed Micah 5:2 Is About the Messiah

I have discovered that I cannot remember the earliest events in my life. I do not remember being born. I do not remember the first year of my life and I do not remember much of my pre-teenage and teenage years. The longer I live the fewer details I seem to remember about past years. If someone were to list the things that I did, I doubt that I would be able to agree or disagree with them. Maybe I might be able to confirm some of them. But I know my father and mother remembered more of the things that I did and I remember many events from my daughters' childhood that they have forgotten. Time causes us to forget so many details. Consequently, I am always amazed when someone claims they know more about the historical events than those who lived through those times, such as the Renaissance era or at the time of Christ's life. We have limited information about ancient civilizations. So we should trust those who witnessed and wrote about the



historical events of the past. They were not stupid people. For example, one of those men was Aristotle (384-322 BC), who was a philosopher and scientist. Another one was Archimedes (287-212 BC), a brilliant mathematician.

The National Geographic lists the seven wonders of the ancient world. Their first wonder is the Pyramids of Giza. Then they list the Hanging Gardens of Babylon, Statue of Zeus, Temple of Artemis, Colossus of Rhodes, Mausoleum of Halicarnassus, and finally the Lighthouse of Alexandria.

Those who designed those wonders were brilliant. Engineers today have said that the ability to build some of them was not available to us until we invented satellites.

According to the National Geographic, Philo of Byzantium wrote,

“I have seen the walls and Hanging Gardens of ancient Babylon, the statue of Olympian Zeus, the Colossus of Rhodes, the mighty work of the high Pyramids and the tomb of Mausolus. But when I saw the temple at Ephesus [Temple of Artemis] rising to the clouds, all these other wonders were put in the shade.”¹

The author of the National Geographic article titled, “Seven Wonders of the Ancient World” wrote that we are ignoring so many other wonders. He said,

While these constructions are stunning achievements

of ancient engineering (sic), they [i.e. historians] don't include marvels from many of the ancient civilizations of Africa, Europe, Asia, and the Americas, which were unknown to the Hellenic peoples.

Although these Seven Wonders are still celebrated today, they show the fleeting nature of even the grand-

1. Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. National Geographic. (education.nationalgeographic.org/resource/seven-wonders-ancient-world).

est physical achievements—nature, human behavior, and the passage of time have destroyed all but one.²

The point is those seven wonders were incredible feats, but so many such wonders have been forgotten. Western cultures are so proud that some historians are selective in which great wonders from ancient civilizations they are willing to recognize. They rewrite historical records to fit their current worldview. It is tragic since once events are erased from the historical record, the truths of past history may be lost.

This is especially true of the historical records in the Bible. The critics of the Bible have a habit of claiming it is inaccurate and untrustworthy. They once claimed that the city of Jericho in the Bible was a myth until archeology discovered the evidence it was a real city. Archeology has repeatedly proven secular critics to be wrong so many times, but the critics tend to forget they have been rebuked by past discoveries. Archeology is a friend of Scripture and an affirmation of the faith. As archaeologists continue to dig, they continue to prove what we already know, the Bible does not contain any mistakes.

A very recent example occurred in May 2022. In an article titled, “Israel: Ancient Tablet Found Affirms Biblical Timeline” in *Decision* magazine, the following statement was made,

A recent discovery of an ancient tablet predating the Dead Sea Scrolls has been uncovered at the site of Mt. Ebal. The folded lead tablet not only affirms the Bible, but supports a traditional understanding of the Old Testament timeline, specifically the early dating for Moses’ writing of the Pentateuch.

The tablet—which mentions God’s Name twice—is about two centimeters by two centimeters, with 40 letters of Hebrew inscription that reference events mentioned in Deuteronomy 27:15-26 and Joshua 8:30. It’s classified as a defixio, which is Latin for “cursed tablet.” It is thought to date to the 14th or 13th centuries B.C., which is consistent with the likely historical timeframe of the Exodus.

The text of the tablet reads: “Cursed, cursed, cursed—cursed by the God YHW. You will die cursed. Cursed you will surely die. Cursed by YHW—cursed, cursed, cursed.”

Scott Stripling of the Archaeological Studies Institute at The Bible Seminary in Katy, said, “On a scale of one to 10, this is a 10. It doesn’t get any bigger than this.”

Gershon Galil, professor of Biblical Studies and Ancient History at the University of Haifa, said the discovery’s significance could not be overstated. “This is a text you find only every 1,000 years,” Galil told *The Times of Israel*.

The newspaper said it “may be one of the greatest archaeological discoveries ever.”³

The message of the tablet affirms the timeline given in the Bible, contrary to claims of the critics. There are numerous other discoveries that affirm the Bible, but we leave them for another time.

What is the point of this introduction? The point is that many people today are distorting history and are not to be trusted when they assume they know more than the eyewitnesses. This is especially true when we explore the truth about Christ. For example, today some Jewish rabbis now reject the interpretation of the ancient Jewish rabbis of some biblical prophecies about the Messiah. They find the earlier interpretations unacceptable because they reject Jesus Christ as the Messiah. In this study, I will give you an example from Micah 5:2. We are going to discover what the ancient Jewish rabbis believed about Micah 5:2. We will discover there is proof that Micah 5:2 was fulfilled, only it has been almost forgotten by the suppression of historical fact.

Date of Prophecy in Micah 5:2. Christians understand Micah 5:2 to be a prophecy about the Messiah. It is clear from the New Testament that it points to Christ. Micah 5:2 is prophecy because there are four reasons we know it was

2. Ibid.

3. Israel: Ancient Tablet Found Affirms Biblical Timeline. *Decision*. May 2022. p. 03.

written before Christ was born. The first reason is a scroll of Micah 5 named 4Q81 is contained in the Dead Sea Scrolls which dated from 175 B.C. to 50 B.C. The second reason we know that Micah 5:2 is prophecy is that it is included in the Septuagint (LXX), a Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures completed about 270 B.C. The third reason is that the prophet Jeremiah mentions Micah as a prophet who existed before his time (Jeremiah 26:18). So, these facts reveal Micah 5:2 was written before Christ was born. Lastly, internal evidence shows that it was written about 735-710 B.C. So, Micah 5:2 is a prophecy that existed 700 years before Christ.

Prophecy of Micah 5:2. Now here is Micah 5:2 from the NASB.

*But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah,
Too little to be among the clans of Judah,
From you One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel.
His goings forth are from long ago,
From the days of eternity.
Micah 5:2 (NASB)*

When Christians read this, they notice that Yahweh has been speaking since Micah 4:6. Yahweh continues speaking to the end of chapter 5. So, Yahweh is speaking in verse 2 when He refers to the city of Bethlehem Ephrathah. At the time the prophecy was written, there were two cities called Bethlehem. One city was in Galilee and the other was in Judah. Consequently, the word Ephrathah was added to help us identify which Bethlehem. Bethlehem Ephrathah was and is about six miles south of Jerusalem. Then Yahweh said the city was “too little.” It was described as small because it was not even included in the list of cities in Joshua 15. So, there is no doubt which city is referred to in this prophecy. Notice that this prophecy is not general, but very specific.

Next, Yahweh stated that “One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel.” The NASB capitalizes “Me” because Yahweh is speaking. “Go forth for Me” is a figurative reference to the virgin birth (Matthew 1:20-24; Luke 1:35).

Then we are told this “One” existed from “long ago.” The Hebrew word *qedem* is translated as “to exist long time before.” In Proverbs 8:23, the word is translated in the NASB

as “the earliest times” of the earth. That is the “One” cannot be human. No human could have lived from the earliest times of the world until the prophet Micah prophesied.

The last line of verse 2 then states this One will be “from the days of eternity.” The Hebrew word for “eternity” is *olam*. The word means “eternal or eternity.” That goes back before the earliest beginning of the world. It goes all the way back to eternity. This once again reveals the One could not be human. He would be an eternal being. If we wrap all of these pieces of information together, we discover the prophecy was about an eternal person who would be born in a specific city named Bethlehem Ephrathah. He would be God and rule Israel.

Christians identify the “One” who would be born in Bethlehem Ephrathah as Jesus Christ. One reason is that Jesus Christ is called the Messiah in both Matthew (Matthew 1:1, 16-17; 2:4), and John (John 1:41; 4:25), and eighty-one other times in the New Testament. Christ is the Greek equivalent for the Hebrew title, Messiah.

Another reason is found in Matthew 2:1-6 which tells us that some magi came from the east searching for the king of the Jews. Here is verses 2-6.

*“Where is He who has been born King of the Jews?
For we saw His star in the east and have come to
worship Him.” When Herod the king heard this, he
was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. Gathering
together all the chief priests and scribes of the people,
he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born.
They said to him, “In Bethlehem of Judea; for this is
what has been written by the prophet:*

*‘AND YOU, BETHLEHEM, LAND OF
JUDAH, ARE BY NO MEANS LEAST
AMONG THE LEADERS OF JUDAH;
FOR OUT OF YOU SHALL COME FORTH A
RULER WHO WILL SHEPHERD
MY PEOPLE ISRAEL.’”*

Matthew 2:2-6 (NASB)

Notice the magi or the wise men asked King Herod where was the Messiah to be born? Since King Herod did not know,

he asked the chief priests and scribes where the Messiah would be born. They said that He would be born in Bethlehem. Then they quoted part of Micah 5:2 and added a line from 2 Samuel 5:2 that summarizes the next two verses. We can thank our God that He recorded this for us so that we could see the chief priests and scribes correctly understood the prophecy of Micah 5:2 to be about the Messiah. Later in Matthew 2:11, we discover the magi visited the Messiah, who was named Jesus Christ.

Modern Rabbis' View of Micah 5:2. Now this creates a problem for rabbis today. They recognize that Micah 5:2 is fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Since this is unacceptable, they have reinterpreted Micah 5:2. The Jewish Study Bible, published in 2004, offers this modern-day interpretation from a Jewish perspective. They state that Micah 5:2 describes,

... the birth pangs of a woman and the hardship of Israel prior to the coming of the Messiah . . . Rab[bi] said: The son of David will not come until the [Roman] power enfolds Israel for nine months . . .⁴

This interpretation cannot be supported by the Hebrew. The Jewish rabbis today have simply reinterpreted Micah 5:2 to refer to birth pangs of a woman and hardship of Israel. It would be unacceptable to have it refer to Jesus Christ. The Pharisees and Sadducees rejected Jesus and many still are rejecting Him.

Ancient Rabbis' View of Micah 5:2. But a careful search reveals the rabbis who lived before Christ was born believed Micah 5:2 referred to the Messiah. For example, in an Aramaic translation of Micah 5:2 called Jonathan Targum, we read this translation,

“And you, O Bethlehem Ephrath, you who were too small to be numbered among the thousands of the House of Judah, from you shall come forth before Me the Messiah, to exercise dominion over Israel, he whose name was mentioned before, from the days of

creation.”⁵

This is an Aramaic translation and commentary of Micah 5:2 by Rabbi Jonathan ben Uziel (first century B.C.). In reality, this is a paraphrase. Notice that in the process, he revealed that he believed the prophecy referred to the Messiah, who would be born in Bethlehem. But he also modified the end of the verse. He may have struggled with the idea the Messiah would be an eternal being.

Alfred Edersheim (A.D. 1825-1889) was a Jew who believed in Jesus Christ and became a follower of Him. He was educated at a Hebrew school and the University of Vienna. He wrote a book named “The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah.” In it he wrote,

As shown by the rendering of the Targum Jonathan, the prediction in Micah v. 2 was at the time universally understood as pointing to Bethlehem, as the birthplace of the Messiah. That such was the general expectation, appears from the Talmud, where, in an imaginary conversation between an Arab and a Jew, Bethlehem is authoritatively named as Messiah’s birthplace.⁶

That is, before Christ was born the Jewish rabbis believed Micah 5:2 was about the Messiah. The Messiah would be born in Bethlehem Ephrathah.

Later in his book he stated,

The well-know passage, Micah v. 2, is admittedly Messianic. So in the Targum, in the Pirqé de R. Eliez. c. 3, and by later Rabbis.⁷

The Targum Palestine also states this about Micah 5:2.

“Out of thee Bethlehem shall Messiah go forth before me to exercise dominion over Israel.”⁸

5. Huckel, T. (1998). The Rabbinic Messiah (Micah 5:2). Philadelphia: Hananeel House.

6. Alfred Edersheim. The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah. Eerdmans Publishing. 1973. Book 2. Chap. VIII. p. 206.

7. Ibid. Appendix IX. p. 735.

8. HaDavar Messianic Ministries. (www.hadavar.org/critical-issues/anti-mission-

4. Berlin and Brettel. The Jewish Study Bible. Jewish Publication Society. Oxford Press. 2004. p. 1213.

Clearly the translators of the Targum Palestine believed that Micah 5:2 referred to the Messiah, and not the birth pangs of a woman and the hardship of Israel prior to the arrival of the Romans.

After Christ appeared, a rabbi from the Medieval period named David Qimhi (1160–1235 A.D.), also called Radak, wrote this about Micah 5:2,

“It will be said in the Messianic age that his ‘origins are from old, from ancient times ...from Bethlehem,’ means that he will be of the House of David, because there is a long period of time between David and the Messiah-King; and he is El (God), which is how he is ‘from old, from ancient times.’”⁹

Risto Santala states in his book “The Messiah in the Old Testament in the Light of Rabbinical Writings”,

“The Rabbis praised Radak’s understanding of spiritual matters and said that without his insight into Scripture, ‘there is no correct biblical exegesis.’”¹⁰

Even though rabbis today highly respect rabbi David Kimchi (1160–1235 A.D.) who believed that the Messianic age has its origin in Bethlehem and that the Messiah would be God Himself, they do not accept that Jesus is the Messiah.

Conclusion. Therefore, we can believe the prophecy of Micah 5:2 is about the Messiah for four reasons.

First, the ancient Jewish rabbis agree with our understanding of Micah 5:2. The rabbis believed Micah was inspired Scripture. They believed Micah 5:2 was a prophecy about the Messiah, that He would be born in Bethlehem Ephrathah.

Second, the gospels of Matthew, Luke, and John quote or allude to the book of Micah as inspired Scripture five times (Matthew 2:5-6; 10:35-36, Luke 12:53; John 7:42). The apostles agreed with the ancient rabbinic understanding of the verse. That is, they believed Micah 5:2 is about the Messiah.

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9. Risto Santala, *The Messiah in the Old Testament in the Light of Rabbinical Writings*, Keren Ahvah Meshihit. 1992. p. 115.

10. Avram Yehoshua. *MESSIAH’S DEITY AND MICAH 5:2*. (www.seedofabraham.net/Messiahs-Deity-and-Micah-5.2.pdf).

This is truly wonderful news! Both the rabbis before Jesus and the apostles agreed about Micah 5:2.

Third, after Christ was born in Bethlehem Ephrathah, Luke 2:10-11 reveals the angel understood Micah 5:2 to refer to the Messiah, to be specific, to Jesus Christ. Listen to the words of the angel who spoke to the shepherds on the night Jesus was born.

But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people; for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. Luke 2:10-11 (NASB)

Now we could change the translation from Christ to Messiah since Messiah is the Hebrew version of Christ. Where did the angel say He had been born? In the city of David, that is Bethlehem! The long-awaited birth of the Messiah had occurred. This was a direct fulfillment of Micah 5:2.

Fourth, Justin Martyr (A.D. 150-160), an early church father, wrote this very important comment about the birth of Christ in his apology. It is a historical fact that many have never heard due to the suppression of historical facts by many. He wrote,

And hear what part of earth He was to be born in, as another prophet, Micah, foretold. He spoke thus: “And thou, Bethlehem, the land of Judah, art not the least among the princes of Judah; for out of thee shall come forth a Governor, who shall feed My people.” Now there is a village in the land of the Jews, thirty-five stadia from Jerusalem, in which Jesus Christ was born, as you can ascertain also from registers of the taxing made under Cyrenius, your first procurator in Judaea.¹¹

Here Justin paraphrased Micah 5:2, and defended the truth that Jesus was born in Bethlehem by saying his readers could check the taxation registers in Bethlehem created at the direc-

11. Justin Martyr. *The First Apology*. Chapter XXXIV., Philip Schaff. *Nicene and Ante-Nicene Fathers*. Hendrickson. 1995. p. 174.

tion of Cyrenius or Quirinius. His message was that Jesus was born in Bethlehem in fulfillment of Micah 5:2. Imagine being able to go to the Bethlehem registry and check the truth of the Christmas story. The prophecy of Micah 5:2 is real. The Messiah came! Our God took on human flesh in order to become our Savior. This is a wonderful prophecy! Praise the Lord for His love and faithfulness.