

## CHAPTER 3

### BIRTH OF MESSIAH

---

Bethlehem's claim to fame in the Hebrew Bible is that it was the location for the story of Ruth, the ancestress of King David. It was also the place where David was born and lived as a youth. According to the prophecy of Micah 5.2 (5.1 in the Jewish Bible) something special was to happen at a future time in Bethlehem.

*'But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of you shall come forth to Me the One to be Ruler in Israel, whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting.'*

This prophecy is linked to the Messiah in the ancient Targum of Micah 5.1-3 (the Targum is an ancient paraphrase of the scripture). This reads:

*'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 from before, from the days of creation.'*

This is significant because it means that ancient rabbis considered this verse to be about the birth of the Messiah.

Rashi agreed that Micah 5 is about the origin of the Messiah. In his commentary on this verse he wrote:

*'And you Bethlehem Ephrathah whence David emanated ... You should have been the lowest of the clans of Judah because of the stigma of Ruth the Moabitess. **From you shall emerge for Me the Messiah, son of David** and so Scripture says (Ps. 118:22): 'The stone the builders had rejected became a cornerstone' and his origin is of old.'*

The verse uses an unusual phrase for the origins of this one prophesied here. The Hebrew phrase for this is **עולם מימי** 'me yemei olam' which means 'from ancient times' or 'from eternity'. In Psalm 90.2 God's existence is described as being 'me olam ve ad olam' **עולם ועד מעולם** — from eternity to eternity. The prophecy of Micah implies that the one to be born in Bethlehem would have his

origins in eternity. Only God has His origins in eternity so this prophecy points to the divine nature of the Messiah.

The opening words of the Gospel of John say:

*'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. ... And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.'*

(John 1.1-3, 14)

Here John is identifying Yeshua / Jesus with the 'Word' who is made flesh and pointing to His origins 'from eternity' and His divine nature.

Matthew and Luke locate the place of His birth as Bethlehem. Matthew records the visit of the Magi from the east, who came seeking the 'King of the Jews.' Arriving in Jerusalem, they enquire where such an event should take place. Herod interprets this as a sign of the coming Messiah (which troubles him!) and gathers together the chief priests and scribes to 'inquire of them where the Messiah was to be born.' (Matthew 2.3-4). The response is :

*'In Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it is written by the prophet, 'But you Bethlehem in the land of Judah are not the least among the rulers of Judah for out of you shall come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.'* (Matthew 2.6)

Matthew goes on to say that the one to be born will be 'Immanuel', Hebrew for 'God with us'. So He will be more than just a mortal human baby, He will be God with us. Matthew quotes Isaiah 7.14 to justify this claim:

*'Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: Behold the almah / virgin shall conceive and bear a Son and shall call his name Immanuel.'*

The usual objection to this interpretation is to say that the word **עלמה** *almah* means young woman, not virgin, and if Isaiah had meant this to be understood 'betullah' **בתולה** . However, the word *almah* does mean a sexually mature woman (capable of bearing a child), but unmarried. It would be expected that such a woman would be a virgin, particularly if God was choosing to give a sign (miracle) through her.

The word 'betullah' is the usual word for virgin, although there are places in the Bible where it is used where it is questionable that it means exclusively a virgin. For example Joel 1.8 where the 'betullah' is mourning for the 'husband of her youth' (so presumably already married and no longer a virgin). It is also used of pagan nations known for their immorality – 'O virgin ('bethulah') daughter of Babylon' (Isaiah 47.1). Interestingly, when the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible (Septuagint) was made the Jewish translators chose a Greek word παρθενος, parthenos to translate the Hebrew 'almah.' This is significant because parthenos only means virgin in Greek and this translation was made at least 160 years before the birth of Jesus.

Isaiah 7.13 shows that this prophecy was given to the whole house of David, not just to the present King Ahaz, as a sign (miracle). This means that its fulfilment could be in events taking place many hundreds of years later, not during the life-time of Ahaz.

According to his human ancestry, the Messiah will also be born of the line of David, to fulfil the promise to David of a descendant who will set up an eternal kingdom:

*'And it shall be when your days are fulfilled, when you must go to be with your fathers, that I will set up your **seed** after you, who will be one of your sons; and I will establish his **kingdom**. He shall build me a **house** and I will establish his **throne** for ever. I will be his father and he shall be my son; and I will not take away my mercy from him, as I took it from him who was before you. And I will establish him in my house and in my kingdom for ever; and his throne shall be established for ever.'*

(1 Chronicles 17.11-14)

The New Testament makes the connection of Yeshua / Jesus to the line of David (Luke 1.27) when the angel Gabriel says to Miriam (Mary):

*'Behold you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son and shall call his name Yeshua (Jesus / salvation). He will be great and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord will give him the **throne of his father David**. And he will reign over the **house** of Jacob for ever and of his **kingdom** there shall be no end.'* ( Luke 1.31-33)

All of this is fulfilled in the miraculous birth of the Messiah Yeshua. It can be no accident that the three eternal things promised to David of his 'seed' in 1 Chronicles 17.11-14 – an eternal **throne**, an eternal **house** and an eternal

**kingdom** - are prophesied here of the ‘seed’ of Miriam. Luke goes on to show that the one who would fulfil this prophecy would be conceived supernaturally by the Holy Spirit:

*“The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will over-shadow you; therefore that holy one who is to be born shall be called the Son of God.”* (Luke 1.35)

It is nothing for God to overrule the laws of nature in order to bring his purposes to fulfilment. — *‘For with God nothing will be impossible.’* (Luke 1.37)

The first verse of the New Covenant reads ‘The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ (Yeshua the Messiah), the Son of David, the Son of Abraham’ (Matthew 1.1). Both Matthew and Luke give genealogies of Jesus putting him in the line of Abraham and David, Matthew’s genealogy giving the royal line going down to Joseph (adopted father of Jesus), Luke’s giving the line from David going down to Miriam (mother of Jesus). (For more on the genealogies of Jesus go to our article ‘The genealogies of Jesus’ at <http://messiahfactor.com/page58.html> )

Luke’s Gospel chapter 2.1-7 shows us how God overruled events through the Roman census to bring Joseph and Miriam down from Nazareth to Bethlehem in order for Yeshua to be born in Bethlehem in fulfilment of the prophecy of Micah 5. Matthew records that He was to be given the name Yeshua יֵשׁוּעַ which means ‘salvation’. The Angel announced:

*“You shall call his name Yeshua יֵשׁוּעַ for He will save His people from their sins.”* (Matthew 1.21).

The Hebrew name ‘Yeshua’ became ‘Jesus’ in Greek, the language in which the New Testament was written. This is why He is known by this name.

(For more on the virgin birth go to our article at:  
<http://messiahfactor.com/page30.html> )

.....