

Part Two

All commentators see a connection between the city of Bethlehem and Messiah. The question is what is this relationship? Micah the prophet clarifies this issue in chapter 4. In this chapter, Micah begins to speak about the last days.

"And it shall come about in the latter days that the mountain of the L-rd shall be established as the chief of all mountains and it shall be exalted above the hills and many people shall stream into it. Many nations shall come and they shall say, 'Come and let us go up to the mountain of the L-rd, to the house of the G-d of Jacob. And He shall teach us His ways and we will walk in paths; for from Zion shall go forth the Torah and the Word of the L-rd from Jerusalem. And He shall judge between many peoples and prove (what is justice) to mighty nations far away. And they shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning knives. And nation will not lift up against nation a sword, and they shall not learn war any longer."

Micah 4:1-3

This prophecy also appears in the book of Isaiah in chapter 2. All the commentators agree that this prophecy is Messianic in nature. In the 10th verse, Micah begins to speak about the Babylonian exile. In the last part of this verse, he confirms that G-d will redeem Judah from Babylon. Most of the commentators say that the following verses (verses 11-13) describe the Messianic age. This period will begin with many nations coming to make war against Israel. It is during this period that G-d will strengthen the Jewish people and defeat the nations,

"And now many nations shall be gathered unto you; they shall say, 'Let her be (called) guilty and let our eyes behold Zion', but they do not know the thoughts of the L-rd and they do not understand His counsel, for He has gathered them like sheaves to the threshing floor. Arise, and thresh, O Daughter of Zion, for your horn I will make iron and your hooves I will make copper and you shall grind many peoples. I will consecrate to the L-rd all their fraudulent riches and their wealth to the L-rd all the earth."

Micah 4:11-13

Micah wrote the fourth chapter emphasizing the fact that the Babylonian captivity will by no means cancel out the future redemption of Israel. In fact, Micah wrote this chapter to encourage the Jewish people; that in spite of a very difficult exile, the promises of G-d are still valid.

At the end of this chapter, there is a very strange and difficult verse to understand,

"Now cut (yourself) O daughter of the battalion. A siege is set against us with a rod they shall strike upon the cheek the Judge of Israel."

Micah 4:14

This verse opens with the word "Now". About which period of time does this verse refer? Most of the commentators think that this verse was speaking about the period of time prior to the destruction of the Second Temple. Therefore, there is a connection between this verse and the Roman exile. It is this exile which is the final one that will end with the coming of the Messiah. The following word is "*cut yourself*". What is the significance of this word? Metzudat Tzion says this word refers to a laceration of the flesh, i.e. cutting, for a religious purpose (pagen). The word appears in the book of Deuteronomy,

*"You are children to the L-rd your G-d, **you shall not cut yourselves** and you shall not make a bald spot between your eyes for a dead person."*

Deut. 14:1

There are additional appearances,

*"They called in a loud voice **and they cut themselves**, according to their custom, with swords and with spears, unto blood poured out upon them."*

I Kings 18:28

*"Baldness comes to Gaza, demolished is Ashkelon, the remnant of the valley; how long **will you cut yourself**."*

Jeremiah 47:5

*"Great and small shall die in this land. Do not bury (them), and do not eulogize for them, (no one) **shall cut himself** (for the dead) and do not make yourself bald for them."*

Jeremiah 16:6

These verses teach us that there was a pagan tradition to cut one's flesh in order to express mourning or deep sorrow. In this verse from Micah, he speaks about the siege of the city of Jerusalem during the days of Titus. It was during this period of time the Second Temple was destroyed and Jerusalem was laid to ruins. Micah used this word in order to reveal the spiritual condition of the Jewish people. This condition was similar to the days of Elijah the prophet,

*"And Elijah said to the prophets of Baal, 'Choose for yourselves one bull and prepare it first for you are the many and call out in the name of your gods but do not put fire.' And they took the bull which he gave to them and they prepared (it) and they called in the name of Baal from the morning until noon saying, 'Baal, answer us.' But there was no voice and there was no response and they danced by the altar which he had made. And it came about an noontime, Elijah ridiculed them and he said, 'Call in a loud voice, for he is god (for) perhaps he is talking or (perhaps) pursuing (an enemy) or (perhaps) relieving himself (or) perhaps he is sleeping and he will awake.' And they called in a loud voice **and they cut themselves** according to their customs with swords and with spears until blood poured out upon them."*

I Kings 18:25-28

Micah concludes this verse and chapter with the words, "*they will hit upon the cheek with a rod the Judge of Israel.*" We have already learned that the context for this verse was the Roman occupation. Therefore, the questions which need to be asked are, "Who is the Judge of Israel?" And "what happened to Him?"

Metzudat David says,

"In the days of the exile, we were despised in their eyes, and they even hit the Judge of Israel upon the cheek with a blow of contempt, and thus it is said, '*Let one offer his cheek to (the one who desires) to hit him, let him be filled with disgrace*' (Lamentations 3:30)."

The answer to the second question is that the Judge of Israel received a blow of contempt and disgust, but it is still not known who was this Judge? In order to help us answer this question, we have to move to the next chapter, Micah chapter 5.

There is no doubt that this paragraph engages in matters dealing with the Messianic age. In the second verse Micah equates the final redemption to a woman giving birth. In spite of very intense pain, the end result is marvelous. In the same manner, so too will the exile end; there will be intense suffering, but at the end the final redemption will come, i.e. the Messianic age.

The chapter opens,

"And you, O Bethlehem, Efratah (too) insignificant to be among the thousands of Judah (but) from you of Me shall go forth (One) (Who is) to be Ruler in Israel. And His origin is from before the days of old."

Micah 5:1

All commentators agree that there is a connection between this verse and Messiah. But, what is this connection? Metzudat David says,

"...there is no intent to say that the king himself will be born in Bet Lechem, but only his origin will be from Bet Lechem, (this origin) is from an earlier time period, from the days of King David, the father of the family; in other words, the location of the Messianic lineage is Bet Lechem, (but the Messiah) Himself will not be born there."

Certainly the foundation of the Messianic lineage is Bethlehem. But is it unreasonable to think that Messiah Himself is born there? Why do commentators emphasize this point (Messiah Himself is not born in Bethlehem) so strongly? Where is the proof for this statement from the text itself? Further study shows a very different conclusion.

The emphasis of this verse is the "Ruler of Israel". Rashi is right when he says that the one who comes from Bethlehem is the Messiah, son of David. Rashi provides the following verse from the Psalms to help one understand the proper context of Micah 5:1 in light of Micah 4:14, "*The stone the builders rejected*" Ps. 118:22 . Hence Rashi understands the Messiah from Bethlehem being rejected.

The fact is that these verses, Micah 4:14 and Micah 5:1, show that the Judge of Israel and the Ruler of Israel are the same individual, King Messiah. Therefore, Metzudat David errs and Bethlehem is indeed the birthplace of Messiah. Why is Bethlehem chosen as the birthplace for Messiah?

Bethlehem is mentioned in chapters 35 and 48 the book of Genesis.

"And Rachel died and was buried on the road to Efratah, this is Bethlehem."

Genesis 35:19

"And I, when I came from Paddan, Rachel died upon me in the land of Canaan, on the road when there was still a distance to come to Efratah, I buried her there on the road of Efrat, this is Bethlehem."

Genesis 48:7

How are these verses relevant to this issue? The prophet Jeremiah gives the answer.

"Thus said the L-rd, a voice on high is heard, bitter weeping, Rachel is crying for her children. She refuses to be comforted concerning her children, for we are no more. Thus said the L-rd, Refrain your voice from weeping, and your eyes from tear(s) for there is a reward for your labor, says the L-rd. You shall return from the land of your enemy. There is hope for your latter (days) says the L-rd. Your sons shall return to their border."

Jeremiah 31:14-16

Jeremiah clarifies that the place that Rachel died will be a source of hope for the future, in other words—the final redemption. And who is it who will bring this redemption? Messiah himself. Therefore, it is most logical to think that the relationship between Bethlehem is not just about the lineage of the house of David, but also as the birthplace of Messiah. This indeed is the significance of the word, "from you" found in Micah 5:1.

The verse continues, *from you of Me shall go forth (One) (Who is) to be Ruler in Israel*. What does the word "of Me" reveal? There are two possibilities.

(1) For Me, or in my behalf. The significance is that Messiah will perform the work of HaShem (G-d's Agent) in order to complete the L-rd's desire, i.e. redemption

(2) Of Me, i.e., of G-d Himself. This means that there is a special relationship between Messiah and G-d.

There is no doubt that Messiah is sent by G-d, but the rest of this verse supports the second interpretation. The following word, "go forth", appears twice in this verse, "**from you of Me shall go forth (One) (Who is) to be Ruler in Israel. And His origin is from before the days of old.**" All the commentators agree that the second usage of the word "**and His origin**" refers to the lineage of the house of David. Then this

means that the first usage also has to be about the lineage of Messiah. This forces one to conclude that the origin of Messiah is indeed G-d.

The verse finishes in a manner which supports this interpretation. "*And His origin is from before the days of old*". Rashi wrote about this sentence "before the sun, His name (Messiah) will exist." The interpretation of Rashi's statement is as follows. "Before G-d created the sun, the name of Messiah will exist." Rashi understood that there is something very special about Messiah. That is, that the origin of Messiah occurred before the creation of the world. The Talmud agrees and says,

"Seven things were created before the creation of the world. These are them: the Torah and repentance, the Garden of Eden and Hell, the throne of glory and the temple, and the name of Messiah."

Talmud Pesachim 54a

The Talmud declares that the Messiah was created. But, Micah the prophet emphasizes that although Messiah is born in Bethlehem, Messiah Himself **comes from G-d**. What is the significance of these words?

We will investigate this issue, G-d willing, in the next article.