



Betlehem in a Prophecy: Theological Analysis of Bethlehem in Micah 5:1-6

Susanto Dwiraharjo

Sekolah Tinggi Teologi Moriah, Indonesia

Email: dwiraharjosusanto@gmail.com

Abstract

Bethlehem is currently the subject of significant discussion and has frequently sparked debate. As a result, tensions have arisen among Christians, which often affects social relationships within the community of believers. This article aims to provide a biblical overview of the truth about Bethlehem to help reduce these tensions. To uncover this truth, we will employ exegesis, which involves thoroughly analysing the biblical text to reconcile differing interpretations and uncover the intended meaning. Through this analysis, we can deduce the significance of Bethlehem for us today and help the church to understand its importance in the context of Christ's redemptive work.

Article History:

Received: October 24, 2024

Accepted: December 23, 2024

Published: January 30, 2025

Keywords:

Bethlehem in a Prophecy
Christ in Old Testament
Christology

INTRODUCTION

Articles on Christology, particularly concerning Christ's prophecies and their fulfilment in the New Testament, have been widely published to date. These articles present various perspectives. However, these publications alone cannot fully address the theme of the fulfilment of prophecy about Christ. There are many other aspects of this topic that can be explored, which often raise significant issues. One example is the prophecy in the Old Testament, specifically Isaiah 7:14, and its fulfilment in Matthew 1:23. This touches on the problematic aspects of quoting the Old Testament in the New Testament, a topic relevant to theological interpretation (Banajab, 2018). Ezekiel's prophecy of the dry bones is analysed in terms of its representation in medieval art. The theological interpretation is explored by comparing the resurrection prophecy to the Creation of Adam. The fulfilment of the prophecy is discussed, including a mention of the controversy surrounding who performed the resurrection miracle, Christ or Ezekiel (Yoanna Planchette, 2021). The paper also examines Old Testament prophecies and their fulfilment in the New Testament, focusing on messianic expectations and how Jesus Christ is seen as the fulfilment

of these prophecies. Theological interpretations of prophecy are also addressed, particularly concerning the messianic title and its significance (P. L. Oduor, 2022). The origins of Christian prophecy in the Jewish tradition are also relevant to Old Testament prophecies. The text mentions Jesus as the Messiah in connection with the fulfilment of prophecy in the New Testament. However, it does not explore theological interpretations of prophecies related to Christ (Efstathios, 2023). The study of Old Testament prophecies about Jesus and their theological interpretation within Evangelicalism touches on how the New Testament uses the Old Testament in relation to Messianic prophecies. However, it primarily focuses on disagreements in interpretation (Walter, 2025).

It discusses the fulfilment of Old Testament prophecies in the New Testament, focusing specifically on Christ's coming as fulfilment. It also touches on the theological understanding of prophecy, suggesting its importance for Christian living. However, it does not delve deeply into the various theological viewpoints. This research suggests that no article has yet been written that specifically explains the prophecy about Christ's birthplace in Micah 5:1–6 and its fulfilment in the New Testament. While most Christians understand that Bethlehem is the birthplace of Christ, the deeper significance of this for believers' spiritual lives remains largely unexplored. Bethlehem has played a significant role in believers' spirituality and has also had a social impact, both nationally and internationally. For instance, Palestine has benefited economically through increased foreign exchange due to Bethlehem's recognition as the birthplace of Christ.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs the method of exegesis, which seeks to reveal the original meaning of a verse by conducting various analyses and relating it to contemporary understanding (Stanley, 2002). This approach ensures that the truths discovered through interpretation can be applied in the present without limiting them to the context in which the text was written (Gordon Fee, 1993). The method involves collecting various literary sources, analysing them and categorising them accordingly (Osborne, 2006). The main theme is then identified within these categorised groups.

This research aims to provide an interpretation that aligns with the truth to which the text refers. It is expected to provide a biblical understanding of Bethlehem. Furthermore, it will offer God's people a fresh perspective on the idea that atonement is achieved through the incarnate God. The incarnation of God began in Bethlehem. Therefore, Bethlehem's role in Christ's redemptive

work is clear. This prophecy was foretold by the prophet Micah. Furthermore, believers can grasp the significance of this prophecy for their spiritual growth. The Church recognises the significance of Bethlehem's role in Christ's redemptive work and understands that Bethlehem is historical evidence of this. This can boost a believer's faith and help them to embody those values in their daily life.

DISCUSSION

Micah 5:1–8 prophesies the significance of Bethlehem, echoing Genesis 48:7. Adversity builds character by teaching obedience and loyalty, and trials confirm the vision worth fighting for. Initially, the focus of the prophets was on God's independent actions, but over time, the hopes of the Israelites centred on leaders such as Moses, Gideon, Samuel and David. They sought a king who would embody human expectations of love, pride and loyalty. Each generation longed for a leader who would bring victory, peace, justice, compassion and truth (Lasor, 1996). This leader would ultimately be victorious, a king, a prophet, a martyr and a servant of God, offering spiritual salvation. Micah was the first to direct Israel's hope towards the coming Saviour, promising divine attributes. Although his prophecies were brief and not always directly tied to the context, they pointed to a deliverer whose identity was not fully revealed. Some referred to Sennacherib's invasion of Judah in 701 BC, but Micah assured them that deliverance would come despite the threat. Micah later foretold Zion's restoration, describing it as the 'tower of the flock' (Lasor, 1996). Despite facing opposition, Zion would triumph and its spoils would be consecrated to God. Micah also prophesied that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem, the city of David. Despite its humble origins, Bethlehem would be the birthplace of a shepherd who would lead God's people with divine power (Matthew 2:6; Harmony, 2009). Micah emphasised that the Messiah's coming would not be marked by royal splendour, but by Israel's restoration, bringing hope and glory — much as David's rise had delivered God's people.

Some English translations (ESV, KJV, NIV, NAS and YLT) include Micah 4:14 as part of Micah 5:1, which reads: 'Now you will build a wall for yourselves; they have set up a siege against us. With their rod they have struck the rulers of Israel on the cheek.' Micah 5:2 then continues, 'But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, are only small in Judah's family, yet a ruler will come from you to lead Israel.' However, the Hebrew text (BHS) places this verse in Micah 5:1, as does the

. Indonesian translation (ITB-2). Although some English translations link Micah 4:14 with Micah 5:1, the context suggests that it is more closely related to the surrounding verses.

BETLEHEM IS LOCATED THE MESSIAH WAS BORN (5:1)

Text, "I But you, O Bethlehem Ephrath, O least of the tribes of Judah, from you will rise up unto me a ruler over Israel, whose beginning was from time immemorial, from time immemorial."

The prophet foretold two things: the birth of the Messiah in Bethlehem, and that He is of eternal origin. Jesus is fully God and fully man. Jesus has legislative and judicial authority, creating and enforcing laws. His followers, both Jews and Gentiles, are His sheep. As their Shepherd, He provides them with constant, gentle and effective care, giving them life.

The birth of the Messiah in Bethlehem (1a)

The phrase 'But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, are only small in size among the clans of Judah' confirms that the Messiah was born in Bethlehem. Situated southwest of Jerusalem, Bethlehem (also known as Ephrath) should not be confused with another Bethlehem in Zebulun (Joshua 19:15). Matthew refers to it as 'Bethlehem in the land of Judah', as mentioned in Ruth 1:1 and Joshua 15:60. Although not officially part of the division of Judah, Bethlehem is only six miles from Jerusalem and is situated on a high plateau. Micah uses both names — Bethlehem, meaning 'house of bread', and Ephrath, meaning 'fertile' — to emphasise its significance. During Rehoboam's reign, Bethlehem gained importance due to its connection to David's family. Despite its small size, it is spiritually significant as the birthplace of the promised king (Walvoord, 1984). The name 'Bethlehem Ephrath' highlights its importance rather than just its location. Once a modest village, Bethlehem became revered as the birthplace of the Messiah, thus fulfilling prophecy. At the time of Jesus, it was a small village, not a large city (Harris, 1981). Matthew affirms this prophecy by quoting the chief priests and scribes, noting the Messiah's birth in Bethlehem with minor variations from the original text. Though small, Bethlehem was the birthplace of the Son of David and his eternal heir. The term 'thousands' refers to Israel's clans, with Bethlehem being part of the tribe of Judah, home to the descendants of David and the Son of God (Delitzsch, 1996). God chose Bethlehem to demonstrate how he elevates the humble (Luke 1:52).

Despite the siege of Jerusalem and the apparent abandonment of Judea, the prophet emphasised the significance of Bethlehem. Matthew 2:4 and 2:6 confirm that, despite its small

size, Bethlehem was revered as the Messiah's birthplace. The name 'Bethlehem', meaning 'house of bread', is fitting for Christ, the bread of life, while 'Ephrath', meaning 'fertile', reflects the area's abundance and the presence of shepherds. Spiritually, Bethlehem became fertile, symbolising God's plan for life and salvation. Although small, Bethlehem plays a central role in God's plan of salvation (Sailhamer, 1992).

Some Jewish traditions interpreted the prophecy of the Messiah's birth in Bethlehem as referring to a local ruler, though this was not originally seen as pointing to Jesus. Certain texts associate Bethlehem with a figure named 'Menachem' (Comforter), son of Hezekiah. Some see this as a reference to Hezekiah or a local ruler, but this contradicts its fulfilment in Jesus (Muddiman, 2001). Although Micah was a prophet of divine wrath, he also foretold the coming of the Messiah, as did Isaiah. Jesus, the true Messiah, was born in Bethlehem, as acknowledged by the Jews, with religious leaders directing people there in Matthew 2:4. Modern Jewish writings also confirm his birth in Bethlehem. Micah's prophecy specifically refers to the Messiah, not to Hezekiah or Zerubbabel. Targum, Jarchi, Kimchi and Abarbinel all confirm that the Messiah, a descendant of David, would rule Israel (Pitkänen, 2018). Matthew 2:6 confirms the fulfilment of the prophecy with Bethlehem as the Messiah's birthplace. Though small, this city gave birth to great figures such as David and Jesus.

Prophecy lends authority to the teachings of the prophets. Although they are often vague at first, they become clear when the event occurs. Micah's prophecy is a prime example of this: though initially unclear, it later revealed Bethlehem to be the Messiah's birthplace, a prophecy that was fulfilled 700 years later. Micah foretold that Jesus, the 'second David' and Saviour, would be born in Bethlehem, the city of David. This prophecy was realised through God's power alone, without human intervention (Varda, 2001). From the first prophecy in Eden concerning Eve's descendants, to Micah's proclamation, Christ's salvation unfolded through conflicts and victories. Around 1,600 years after Eden, Abraham was chosen as the forefather of Israel, and two centuries later Jacob prophesied the coming of Shiloh, the Prince of Peace. Then, 700 years later, Micah predicted that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem, elevating this small town to the birthplace of the great King (Delitzsch, 1996).

In this prophecy, the phrase 'for me' emphasises that the Messiah came as God's incarnation to fulfil the Father's will, save humanity and intercede for his people (Waltke, 1990). Born in Bethlehem, He is both a descendant of David and the eternal Word of God. 'For me' reflects God's

plan of salvation through His Son. Though small and insignificant, Bethlehem became noble through Christ's birth. Once a humble village, Bethlehem surpassed cities such as Rome and Alexandria in significance. The birth of Christ, the most significant event in history, united his divine and human natures. According to Micah's prophecy, the Messiah is the "ruler" who will lead humanity, marking a miraculous moment that alters history and impacts the world through His salvation (Pitkänen, 2018).

The Messiah Comes from Eternity (1b)

The phrase 'whose beginning is from time immemorial' highlights the eternal nature of the Messiah, affirming his divine existence and his role in the eternal covenant to save humanity. This concept is echoed in Psalm 72:17, which suggests that the Messiah's name has existed forever. Although He was born into history, His divine nature transcends time. Isaiah also refers to the Messiah as 'the Mighty God' (Isaiah 9:5), emphasising his eternal existence (Vangemeren, 1997). This prophecy reminds us that the Messiah, the Creator, existed before time and came to Earth to save humanity. While Jews understood Micah's prophecy that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem, some who reject Christ distort its meaning. They question how the Messiah, born in Bethlehem, could also be from Galilee and a descendant of David. Christians believe that this prophecy was fulfilled only by Christ (Walvoord, 1984). Although some Jews recognised Bethlehem as the Messiah's birthplace, they misinterpreted the prophecy by claiming that the Messiah would 'depart from Bethlehem' as a descendant of David. This misrepresents the prophecy's clear meaning: the Messiah himself would be born in Bethlehem, not merely his descendants (Delitzsch, 1996).

Micah emphasises that the Ruler has an eternal origin, thereby referring to Christ's eternity. Although he was born in Bethlehem at a specific time, Christ existed from eternity, demonstrating that God the Son existed prior to the creation of the world. The phrase 'from time immemorial' signifies that God transcends time and space (Sailhamer, 1992). This eternal existence is difficult to grasp, but Scripture uses terms such as 'from time immemorial' to describe it. Christ's birth in the humble town of Bethlehem exemplifies humility. As a descendant of David, he came to establish his kingdom. Micah calls him the 'Ruler of Israel', affirming his divine nature. The phrase 'His departure is eternal' points to his dual nature — both human and divine — indicating that his reign will eventually extend to all mankind (Wenham, 1981). The promise of a Saviour, first given

in Genesis, was fulfilled through David's lineage and Bethlehem, and was ultimately realised in Jesus.

Although Bethlehem was a small town, it became the birthplace of the Messiah, who would rule Israel. It was from this humble town that the eternal leader emerged. Christ, the shepherd king, tenderly guides his people, just as David did. He came not for personal gain, but to meet humanity's needs (Varda, 2001). As the eternal Lord, he transcended time and entered history to save his people. Bethlehem, renowned for its fertile soil, is revered as the birthplace of the sovereign King. Although born as a man, Christ is eternal and equal to the Father. He is the eternal leader who feeds and guides his people. Micah's prophecy foretold the restoration of Israel, beginning with the house of David, and deliverance from Bethlehem, the city of David's birth. While Micah focused on rural life and the loss of Israel's king, Isaiah saw Jerusalem as the centre of power (Wenham, 1981). Micah's prophecy foretold the birth of the Eternal Ruler in Bethlehem amid Israel's suffering.

Though Bethlehem Ephrata was a small town, it would be the birthplace of the Messiah, who would rule Israel. An eternal leader would emerge from this seemingly insignificant town. This Messiah would be more than just a human leader; he would be the ruler, restorer, and shepherd of humanity. Linked to the House of David, Bethlehem became a symbol of the coming King. Just as Samuel was surprised to find a king in Bethlehem, Christ's arrival was unexpected, bringing a kingdom that defied the world's expectations. Like David, Christ is a shepherd-king who guides and protects his people (Walvoord, 1984). Christ came to address humanity's suffering, not for personal gain, but to meet the world's needs. As the eternal Lord, he transcended time and entered history to save his people. Bethlehem, renowned for its fertile soil, is revered as the birthplace of the sovereign King. Although born as a man in Bethlehem, Christ is eternal and equal to His Father. He is the eternal leader who guides His people (Sailhamer, 1992). Micah's prophecy foretold the restoration of Israel, beginning with the house of David and deliverance from Bethlehem. Although Micah and Isaiah both prophesied during the same period, Micah centred his prophecies around rural life and the loss of Israel's king, whereas Isaiah viewed Jerusalem as the centre of power (Delitzsch, 1996). Micah's prophecy describes the birth of the Eternal Ruler in Bethlehem amidst Israel's suffering.

It is widely accepted that the ruler coming from Bethlehem refers to the Messiah, rather than Zerubbabel as some have suggested. The phrase 'coming from Bethlehem' highlights the

Messiah's humble origins, while 'from the days of old, from the days of eternity' speaks to his eternal nature (Waltke, 1990). Micah not only prophesied the birth of the Son of God, but also His eternal origin and earthly appearance. Interpretations that reduce 'His beginning' to David's family or ordinary descendants are incorrect. The Messiah's origin is eternal and not from a mere human lineage. Micah affirmed that the Messiah, born in Bethlehem, would be a descendant of David and reign forever. This aligns with Matthew 2:5–6 and John 7:42, in which the Jews recognised the prophecy of the Messiah's birth in Bethlehem. The visit of the Magi in Matthew 2:1-11 further confirms the prophecy's fulfilment. Although Bethlehem was small, it was glorified by Christ's birth and became the honoured birthplace of the Messiah (Pitkänen, 2018). The prophecy of Zion's glory was thus fulfilled with the announcement of the ruler who would lead Israel to its divine purpose (Micah 5:2).

BETHLEHEM IS THE PLACE WHERE THE WORK OF REDEMPTION BEGAN (2-3)

This section discusses prophecies from the start of God's plan of redemption. This work began with God's incarnation as a man. This man, who was God, would shepherd the people with God's power.

The Work of Redemption is carried out through the Incarnation (2)

Text, "Therefore he will let them go until the time when the woman who is about to give birth has given birth; and then the rest of her brothers will return to the children of Israel."

The phrase 'Therefore he will leave them until the time when the woman who is with child has given birth' is similar to Hosea 2:14. The word 'therefore' explains why Israel was temporarily handed over to the nations: the Messiah was to come from Bethlehem, not Jerusalem (Holladay, 1988). This foretells the downfall of David's family and the loss of their throne as a result of Israel's sins. The people's suffering and hunger were part of their destiny until the Messiah brought deliverance (Delitzsch, 1996). Although the people of Israel would endure hardship before the Messiah's birth, God permitted this suffering as part of His plan, which would culminate in the arrival of the Messiah. Prophecy suggests that Israel would suffer until they repented, as in Isaiah 66:7. The Talmud notes that the Messiah would come after the kingdom had spread worldwide, referencing his birth. The period between the prophecy and the Messiah's birth was characterised by invasions, exile and conflict (Muddiman, 2001). After a brief period of peace, the Jews continued to wait for the promised Messiah.

Restoration will occur when the Virgin Mary gives birth to God's Son and Judah, Israel and the Gentiles embrace Christianity. According to God's plan, Israel will be handed over to her enemies until the appointed time. 'She who travails in childbirth' refers to the Virgin Mary, who gave birth to the Messiah (Isaiah 7:14), as well as to the tribulation endured by Israel. Israel's deliverance will coincide with the coming of the Messiah as Saviour in the last days (Romans 11:26), bringing spiritual deliverance to the Church (Sailhamer, 1992). The suffering of the early Church, symbolised by Mary's pain in childbirth, represents the waiting for the Messiah's birth and Israel's ongoing suffering. This will end when Christ returns as Jacob's deliverer and Israel is restored in one day (Isaiah 66:7–11; Luke 21:24; Revelation 12:1–4). God will allow his people to suffer until the appointed time, after which the remnant of Israel will return (Walvoord, 1984). Christ will stand, feed and protect his people, ensuring their peace and safety to the ends of the earth through his greatness.

The Messiah, of eternal origin, will bring salvation to Israel at the appointed time. The Virgin Mary will give birth to the Messiah in Bethlehem, thus fulfilling prophecy (Luke 2:25–38). Israel's deliverance will come through the Messiah as Saviour in the last days, bringing spiritual salvation to the Church (Romans 11:26). However, despite His birth in Bethlehem, the Jews rejected Jesus, which led to their blindness and suffering under Roman rule. They remain scattered, with Jerusalem being trampled by the nations until the time allotted to the Gentiles (Luke 21:24) (Pitkänen, 2018). God allowed Israel to be abandoned to its enemies, with most Jews in exile and distant from their land (2 Chronicles 36:17), and His presence became less visible. The loss of sacred symbols marked the waiting period for the Messiah. Israel will be restored through a renewed covenant (Malachi 4:6) and all believers, both Jews and Gentiles, will unite in faith as brothers and sisters in Christ (Hebrews 2:11). According to Micah's prophecy, the remnant of Israel, including Judah, Benjamin, and Jews worldwide, will return to God, physically and spiritually reuniting with the Israelites in Canaan and acknowledging Christ as the Messiah (Varda, 2001).

This prophecy refers to events following the birth of the Saviour. The phrase 'the rest of his brethren will return to the children of Israel' refers to those who are true Israelites in spirit, not just in lineage (John 1:47; Romans 9:6). Jesus' 'brethren' are those who do God's will; as he said, 'Whoever does the will of my Father is my brother and sister' (Matthew 12:50). God's promise extends to all who are called by Him, including both Jews and Gentiles, who are united in Christ (Ephesians 2:12–14). Christ refers to them as 'His brethren', including both Jews and Gentiles who

are saved through Him. The prophecy also includes Jews who repent and join true Israel in Christ (Sailhamer, 1992). Though scattered, they will be reunited in the Messiah and 'all Israel will be saved' (Romans 11:26).

Messiah Shepherds in God's Strength (3)

Text, "3Then he will act and will shepherd them in the power of the LORD, in the splendor of the name of the LORD his God; they will remain, for now he is great to the ends of the earth."

The Messiah will be a glorious leader who will shepherd His people with wisdom and love. He will lead with divine power rather than human strength and will speak with unique authority to bring salvation and lasting peace. Under his reign, his people will live securely in God's presence and his church will endure forever (Wenham, 1981). As both King and Shepherd, the Messiah will provide protection, guidance and sustenance with divine tenderness and strength. His God-given power will shield his people from all threats (Muddiman, 2001).

Unlike David, the Messiah will rule with divine authority, bringing worldwide peace and salvation and protecting his people from enemies. His majesty reflects God's power, blending strength with gentleness. He is both majestic and humble: fierce against His enemies, yet bringing peace to His people. Under his leadership, his people will be secure and united under one shepherd. His greatness will extend globally, bringing salvation to all nations. As foretold, His authority will cover the earth (Luke 1:32). Biblical prophecies testify to Jesus as the Good Shepherd who leads, restores and protects his people by providing them with nourishment, guidance and security in challenging times (Delitzsch, 1996). Although not yet fully realised, Christ's kingdom will expand globally and he will be worshipped throughout the earth.

BETLEHEM IS THE FIRST PLACE WHERE PEACE WAS PROCLAIMED (4-8)

First, Bethlehem is seen as the birthplace of the Messiah. Next, it is said that the Messiah achieved salvation by becoming incarnate. This part of Bethlehem is considered the location where 'peace' was proclaimed.

Text, "4 and he became peaceable. If Assyria enters our land and he sets foot on our ground, we will raise up against him seven shepherds, even eight leaders of men."

The Messiah Who Brings Peace (4)

The phrase 'and he became peace' refers to the Messiah, who will bring peace through his reign. Despite having enemies such as the Assyrians, the Messiah offers peace to his people, just

as Hezekiah triumphed over Sennacherib with God's help. The seven shepherds symbolise deliverance, pointing to the Messiah's ability to save the Church from darkness, Satan and destruction. Born in Bethlehem, the Messiah is the source of peace, reconciling Jews and Gentiles, and restoring the relationship between God and humanity through his death. Christ is our peace (Ephesians 2:14; Isaiah 9:6) and offers peace, which was proclaimed by angels at His birth (Luke 2:14) and through His teachings (John 14:27) (Pitkänen, 2018). His love and forgiveness break down barriers, fostering unity and peace in personal and global relationships alike.

Assyria, Israel's greatest historical enemy, symbolises all of Israel's enemies, who will be defeated when the Messiah comes (Ezekiel 38:1-23). Despite threats such as those posed by Assyria or the forces of darkness, the Messiah will protect and deliver his people, bringing peace and prosperity. Just as Sennacherib's Assyrian attack threatened Judah, worldly powers and Satan will attempt to oppress Christ's kingdom (Muddiman, 2001). Under the Messiah's rule, Israel will be led by a 'shepherd' who will drive out the enemies and provide protection. The numbers seven and eight symbolise strength and victory. Assyria represents physical and spiritual enemies attacking God's people. Under Messianic rule, Israel will enjoy perfect peace as the Messiah abolishes war and idolatry (Walvoord, 1984). 'When Assyria comes' refers to the collapse of the Assyrian Empire and its threat to Israel. 'This Son of Man will bring peace when the Assyrians come' means that Christ is the source of peace in the face of enemy attacks. Although enemies may oppress, they cannot conquer the souls of those who are saved in Christ. Christ protects his people in adversity as 'our peace' and provides comfort in persecution, and believers find joy in his suffering and in overcoming challenges (Sailhamer, 1992).

In the Book of Isaiah, the Messiah is referred to as the 'Prince of Peace', and the angels announce his arrival by singing 'peace', linking his incarnation to the restoration of peace in a chaotic world. In Christian teaching, peace is closely linked to Christ, particularly through his death, which is said to have reconciled humanity with God. Assyria represents invaders who corrupt souls and trample on hearts and minds (Wenham, 1981). God will raise up seven shepherds and eight leaders to defend his people. The seven shepherds probably refer to the Maccabean family, while the eight leaders may represent the Hasmonean princes or other figures who resisted the Persian rulers. The numbers seven and eight symbolise completeness and divine power. 'Clear the land' refers to the actions of Merodach Baladan, and 'the land of Nimrod' refers to Assyria

(Pitkänen, 2018). Ultimately, the Messiah will deliver his people, with Assyria representing all enemies of God's people.

In this prophecy, the seven shepherds or princes are spiritual leaders, such as David, Abraham and Moses, who will help the Messiah to lead the Church. The 'shepherds' are spiritual leaders who serve under the authority of the Messiah, while the 'princes' refer to civil leaders. The number seven symbolises completeness and eight represents abundance, indicating that there will be a sufficient number of leaders (Job 5:19; Proverbs 6:16; Ecclesiastes 11:2). These leaders are anointed by the Holy Spirit (1 John 2:20, 2:27) and appointed to defend the Church and teach the faith amid persecution (Sailhamer, 1992). This passage portrays Christ as the 'peace' that reconciles a world separated from God. Through his death on the cross, Christ offers true peace, bridging the gap between God and humanity. As both priest and king, he defeats the enemies of the church, symbolised by Assyria and the Chaldeans, who represent secular and satanic powers (Varda, 2001). Their destruction signifies the Church's triumph and the salvation of God's people.

Christ is fully God and fully man. He is the sinless 'Lamb' who atones for our sins and brings peace. Through his blood, he removes the enmity between God and humanity, offering peace to sinners and saints alike. This peace is vital for facing life's challenges, which are symbolised by 'Assyria', a threat or trial. Although the consequences of sin remain, Christ calms our storms and grants us joyful peace. In order to receive this peace, believers must stay close to God and, with the help of the Holy Spirit, maintain a clean conscience. Although spiritual victory is secured in Christ, physical battles with worldly powers will persist until the Messiah's final salvation (Muddiman, 2001). This ongoing conflict does not contradict the prophecy that all nations will come to Zion, as hostility towards God and his people will persist until the final judgement, when all enemies will be defeated.

Number of Enemies Defeated (5)

Text, "5 They will shave the land of Assyria with the sword and the land of Nimrod with the drawn sword; they will deliver us out of Assyria, when it enters our land and sets foot on our territory."

The land of Nimrod, which is synonymous with Babylon, was founded by Nimrod, a mighty hunter who established his kingdom there. While some believe that Nimrod's rule extended to Assyria, others argue that Assyria and Nimrod refer to different regions. Assyria, named after a man, is distinct from Babylon, founded by Nimrod and including cities such as Nineveh, the

Assyrian capital (Genesis 10:11–12; Delitzsch, 1996). Babylon, founded by Nimrod, later replaced Assyria as God's instrument of judgement. Both represent rebellion against God. The Medes and Persians captured Babylon by controlling the Euphrates River, as prophesied by Jeremiah (Jeremiah 51:32, 36). Calmet suggests that this refers to Cambyses' conquest and the revolt of Babylon's eight princes (Muddiman, 2001). However, it is more likely to refer to Nebuchadnezzar's invasion of Judah and the subsequent destruction of Babylon by Cyrus, who killed Belshazzar and seized power.

At the time of this prophecy, Assyria and Babylon may have been united under the rule of King Esarhaddon. The prophecy foretells their destruction at the hands of Christian princes, symbolised by the 'sword'. When Assyria invades, seven shepherds and eight princes will rise up and defeat them, symbolising the conquest of nations by the 'sword of the Spirit' — the Word of God, the gospel and the apostolic ministry (Walvoord, 1984). This could also refer to the Ottoman Empire's defeat at the hands of Christian forces. As described in Scripture, leaders will guide God's people to victory. Not only will the shepherds of Israel survive, they will also defeat their enemies. Even Satan's attempts to destroy the Church will lead to its growth, as persecution strengthens faith. The prophecy speaks of the remnant of Jacob becoming a mighty power, like dew among nations and a lion trampling its enemies (Walvoord, 1984). It concludes with the destruction of idols, enemy forces and the cities of Assyria — all at the hands of God's wrath against those who reject Him.

People Experience Peace (6-8)

Text, "6 Then the remnant of Jacob will be in the midst of many nations like the dew of the LORD like rain upon vegetation that does not wait for men and does not expect the children of men."

'The remnant of Jacob' refers to God's chosen people, comprising both Jews and Gentiles who are true Israelites. Though they are few in number and are often despised, they are preserved by God and live differently from the rest of the world. Despite their apparent insignificance, God protects and respects them. This prophecy may refer to the Jews in Persia under Mordecai and Esther, or to the time of the Maccabees. According to Micah and Isaiah, the remnant will return to God and will include those who believe in Christ — the 'little flock' (Luke 12:32) (Muddiman, 2001). They will spread the gospel worldwide, as seen with apostles such as John, Thomas, Peter

and Paul. The growth of the remnant is like 'dew from God' — independent of human effort yet spiritually alive.

Like dew, God's people are resurrected by His grace, silently descending from heaven. This subtle grace refreshes and gives life to even the withered. Just as plants depend on dew, God's people spread His knowledge even in captivity, as seen in the story of Daniel. In the last days, the 'dew of the Lord' will spread through the gospel, bringing restoration (Romans 11:12, 25). God's people will be like dew: gentle yet powerful, spreading His grace through words and deeds (Briggs, 1996). The gospel and the grace of Christ combine tenderness and strength to bring life and nourishment. As Scripture says, 'My teaching will fall like rain, my words like dew' (Deuteronomy 32:2) (Sailhamer, 1992). Like dew, pastors and teachers quietly exert a powerful divine influence, imparting God's blessings without asking or deserving.

Like rain on grass, God's people provide refreshment and encouragement, fostering growth. Their influence stems from God's will, not human effort. Just as grass naturally grows from rain, God's people and their teachings rely entirely on God's provisions. God's grace, symbolised by dew and rain, promotes growth regardless of human action. It blesses both the good and the wicked, and wherever God's people are, they will be a blessing, bringing good to those who treat them kindly. This can be seen in the apostles, who spread the gospel despite suffering, and who enriched the church through their deaths (2 Corinthians 4:12). Led by the Holy Spirit, their teachings foster spiritual growth (Pitkänen, 2018). The church flourishes not through human wisdom, but through divine truth, growing beyond human influence or philosophy.

The remnant of Jacob will be scattered among the Gentiles, described as blessings in the form of dew and rain that nourish and refresh (Micah 5:7). They will also be like young lions: strong, courageous and superior to their enemies. While this may refer to the Maccabean period, it is more likely to point to the end times, when the Jews will triumph over their adversaries under God's leadership. Dew symbolises Christ's gentle and peaceful love, while the lion represents strength and courage. These qualities reflect the apostles' approach: gentle in teaching, yet firm in rebuke (Delitzsch, 1996). As Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 5:19–6:11, the apostles were ambassadors for Christ, urging reconciliation with God.

Christ, who is referred to as both the Lamb and the 'Lion of the tribe of Judah' (Revelation 5:5), demonstrated his power and authority. His 'wrath' (Revelation 6:16) symbolises

the power that will be wielded in the end times, when spiritual Israel — the Christian church — will experience great blessings and victories. As the head of the Church, the Messiah will destroy His enemies with the sword of His mouth and bring peace to His people. The remnant of Jacob, representing the Church, will triumph over the nations that oppose Christ (Walvoord, 1984). Empowered by Christ, Christian leaders will unleash God's wrath and defeat all enemies of the Church.

The Church's power and glory come from Christ, so to oppose the Church is to oppose Him. God will destroy enemies such as Julian, Arius and the Antichrist (2 Thessalonians 2:8). Ultimately, Satan will be defeated and the Church will crush its enemies (Luke 10:19; Romans 16:20; Sailhamer, 1992). All enemies of Christ and his church — including earthly kings, wild beasts, false prophets and their followers (Revelation 19:19) — will be defeated by the Messiah. He will establish peace, shield His people from threats such as Assyria and empower them to triumph over adversaries, both spiritual and physical (Micah 5:7-9). Firstly, Israel will bless many nations, like God's dew refreshing the grass, symbolising spiritual blessings from God that do not require human effort (Micah 5:7). Secondly, the saved nation of Israel will become a mighty power, like a lion conquering its enemies, thereby demonstrating God's power and victory over all opposition (Micah 5:8-9) (Wenham, 1981).

CONCLUSION

Micah's prophecy about Bethlehem brought hope to the oppressed, especially the peasants, by promising a Saviour born not of nobility, but of ordinary people who would understand their suffering. This united Israel in the hope of deliverance, with the Messiah as their 'peace' and shepherd. Micah portrays the Messiah as humble, practical and familiar with everyday life. His prophecy emphasises Christ's humanity — born into humble circumstances and sharing in human suffering. He was not a distant figure, but someone who understood the struggles of ordinary people. His gospel resonated with the poor and marginalised, flourishing among those overlooked by worldly powers. Micah's prophecy of the shepherd is divided into several sections, but ultimately points to the One. Although Christ was born in Bethlehem, his origin is eternal as the Son of God. Rejected by the Jews, he remains the shepherd of humanity, reconciling us through his crucifixion. God's people refresh the world like dew and are as bold as lions, whereas worldly powers — such as horses, chariots, walled cities and magic — distance people from God. These

arguments highlight the significance of Bethlehem as the birthplace of Jesus. Bethlehem is historical evidence of Christ's redemptive work. This article will help the Church teach the faithful biblical truths about Bethlehem as the place where the work of salvation was declared. Additionally, this article can serve as a reference for future research on similar topics.

REFERENCES

- Banajab Tonajobah . Isaiah's Prophecy of the Birth of Immanuel (Isaiah 7:14) in Matthew's Account of the Birth of Messiah (Matthew 1:23), DOI:10.7251/CPBFSVO1716099T, 2018.
- Briggs, C., E. Brown dan S. Driver. The Brown Driver Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon. Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publisher, Inc., 1996.
- Delitzsch, F.C.F. Keil. Commentary on The Old Testament. Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publisher, 1996.
- Harris, R. Laird. Theological wordbook of the Old Testament. V.I-II. Chicago: Moody Press, 1981.
- Fee. Gordon D. & Douglas Stuart. How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth. Michigan: Zondervan, 1993.
- Harmony, A. Commentaries on the four last Book of Mikha. Michigan: Baker Books, 2009.
- Holladay, William L. (ed). A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament. Grand Rapids: Wulliam B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988.
- Gaebelein (ge), Frank E.). The Expositor's Bible Commentary Mikha. Michigan: Zondervan, tt.
- Lasor, William Sanford. Old Testament Survey. Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996.
- Muddiman, John and John Barton (ge). The oxford bible Commentary the Mikha. Oxford Universaty Press, 2001.
- P.L.Oduor. Christological Reflections: A Biblical Perspective; DOI:10.37284/eajtr.5.1.567; Corpus ID: 247356614, 2 March 2022
- Pitkänen, Pekka. A Commentary on Micha, Narrative, Ritual and Colonialism. London: Taylor and Franscis Group. 2018.
- Osborne, Grant R. The Hermeneutical Spiral. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2006.
- Porter, Stanlay E. Hand Book to Exegesis of the New Testament. Boston: Brill Academic Publishers, Inc., 2002.
- Sailhamer, John H. The Minor Prophet as Narrative. Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992.
- Varda. The Books of Minor Prophet Edition of a New JPS Translation of The Holy Scriptures According To the Masoretic Text. Illinois: Varda Books, 2001.
- Waltke, Bruce K. dan M. O'Connor. An Introduction Biblical Hebrew Syntax. Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 1990.

Walter Creighton Marlowe, Religions, Evangelicalism and Old Testament Messianic Prophecy, 2025, DOI: 10.3390/rel16040449, Corpus ID: 277533649).

Walvoord, John F. dan Roy B. Zuck. The Bible Knowledge Commentary, Old Testamen Edition. USA: SP Publications, Inc. 1984.

Wenham, Gordon J. An Introduction & Commentary Mikha. Illinois: Intersivarsity Press, 1981.

Vangemeren, Willem A (ge). New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis. Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1997.