

The Many Expeditions of the Son of God (Micah 5:2)

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The Jewish Encyclopedia, which is by no means Christian, has an article on the concept of the preexistence of the Messiah in ancient Judaism.

“Preexistence of the Messiah:

*“This includes his existence before Creation; the existence of his name; his existence after the creation of the world. **Two Biblical passages favor the view of the preexistence of the Messiah: Micah v. 1 (A. V. 2), speaking of the Bethlehemite ruler, says that his ‘goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting’; Dan. vii. 13 speaks of ‘one like the Son of man,’ who ‘came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days.’** In the Messianic similitudes of Enoch (xxxvii.-lxxi.) the three preexistences are spoken of: ‘The Messiah was chosen of God before the creation of the world, and he shall be before Him to eternity’ (xlvi. 6). Before the sun and the signs of the zodiac were created, or ever the stars of heaven were formed his name was uttered in the presence of the Lord of Spirits (= God; xlvi. 3). Apart from these passages, there are only general statements that **the Messiah was hidden and preserved by God** (lxii. 6-7, xlvi. 1-3), without any declaration as to when he began to be. His preexistence is affirmed also in II Esdras (about 90 C.E.), according to which he has been **preserved and hidden by God ‘a great season’; nor shall mankind see him save at the hour of his appointed day** (xii. 32; xiii. 26, 52; xiv. 9), although no mention is made of the antemundane existence either of his person or of his name (comp. Syriac Apoc. Baruch, xxix. 3). ... **“The ‘Spirit of God’ which ‘moved upon the face of the waters’ (Gen. i. 2) is the spirit of the Messiah** (Gen. R. viii. 1; comp. Pesik. R. 152b, which reads as follows, alluding to Isa. xi. 2: **‘The Messiah was born [created] when the world was made, although his existence had been contemplated before the Creation’**). Referring to Ps. xxxvi. 10 and Gen. i. 4, Pesikta Rabba declares (161b): **‘God beheld the Messiah and his deeds before the Creation, but He hid him and his generation under His throne of glory.’** Seeing him, Satan said, ‘That is the Messiah who will dethrone me.’ **God said to the Messiah, ‘Ephraim, anointed of My righteousness, thou hast taken upon thee the sufferings of the six days of Creation’** (162a; comp. Yalk., Isa. 499). **The preexistence of the Messiah in heaven and his high station there are often mentioned.** Akiba interprets Dan. vii. 9 as referring to two heavenly thrones — the one occupied by God and the other by the Messiah (Hag. 14a; comp. Enoch, lv. 4, lxix. 29), with whom God converses (Pes. 118b; Suk. 52a).”¹*

¹ Jewish Encyclopedia, Article: “Preexistence”
<http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/12339-preexistence>

The Jewish Encyclopedia article mentions two main Old Testament passages that were understood by ancient Jews to refer to Messiah's preexistence in heaven, Micah 5:2 and Daniel 7. The former refers to the Messiah going forth from Bethlehem, and the latter refers to the "Son of Man" coming in the clouds of heaven to reign in His Kingdom. For the ancient Jews (who did not understand two distinct Advents of the Messiah), the prophecy of Psalm 110 (which describes the Messiah seated at God's right hand in heaven until the time of His Kingdom) also indicates a literal preexistence prior to arriving as Messiah. However, Christians understand both passages to refer to His coming from heaven at His second Advent. Both Psalm 110 and Daniel 7 which describe the Messiah in heaven are critically important for properly understanding the Jewish expectations of a heavenly Messiah at the time of Christ.

However, Micah 5:2 is the pivotal Old Testament prophecy for understanding the ancient Christian perspective and concept of preexistence of Messiah before His birth in Bethlehem. The correct translation and understanding of this passage is critical for Christians who are grappling with the various theological systems regarding God and His Son, and understanding why the earliest Christians taught that the Son only preexisted from the beginning of creation, not from eternity.

Most of our English versions incorrectly translate Micah 5:2 to make it conform to the Trinitarian concept of a co-eternal three-Person Godhead. The Jewish Bible (JPS), however, cannot be charged with having a Trinitarian bias, nor can the Septuagint (LXX) which was translated into Greek by Temple priest-scribes centuries before the birth of Christ. Here is the (non-Christian) Jewish Bible's rendering of this passage.

Micah 5:2 (JPS)² But thou, Beth-lehem Ephrathah, which art little to be among the thousands of Judah, out of thee shall one come forth unto Me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth are from of old, from ancient days.

Of the Christian translations, Young's Literal Translation is the most faithful to the Hebrew text.

Micah 5:2 (YLT) And thou, Beth-Lehem Ephratah, Little to be among the chiefs of Judah! From thee to Me he cometh forth – to be ruler in Israel, And his comings forth are of old, From the days of antiquity.

Notice that the term "goings forth" (JPS) and "comings forth" (YLT) are plural, referring to multiple excursions or expeditions of the Messiah in ancient times. Some Christian

² Jewish Publication Society Version

versions translate it as a plural, but others incorrectly use the singular referring to a single event.

Also, what the JPS translates as “*from ancient days*” and the YLT renders “*from days of antiquity*” many Christian English versions render as “*from eternity*” or “*from everlasting.*” The NASB even has “*days of eternity*” which is an oxymoron because “*days*” only began to exist on “*day one*” of the six-day creation week.³

All of the English translations which render this clause as referring to eternity are incorrect. They have imposed Trinitarian presuppositions onto the text, and fail to accurately convey the meaning of the Hebrew text. This most important text regarding the pre-human activity of the Son of God is obscured in order to place the Trinitarian “*God the Son*” in eternity past as co-eternal with God, and to deny that He had an origin in time, as “*the Beginning of the creation of God*”⁴ and “*the first-produced of all creation.*”⁵

We now turn our attention to the Septuagint, the Greek version that was read in the synagogues all over the Roman empire at the time of Christ.

Micah 5:2 (LXX) καὶ σύ Βηθλεεμ οἶκος τοῦ Εφραθα ὀλιγοστός εἶ τοῦ εἶναι ἐν χιλιάσιν Ἰουδα ἐκ σοῦ μοι ἐξελεύσεται τοῦ εἶναι εἰς ἄρχοντα ἐν τῷ Ἰσραὴλ καὶ αἱ ἐξοδοὶ αὐτοῦ ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς ἐξ ἡμερῶν αἰῶνος

The literal word-for word translation⁶ reads as follows.

*Micah 5:2 (LXX) And you, Bethlehem, house of Ephratha, are insignificant among the thousands of Judah; [yet] out of you shall go forth for me one to be for a ruler in Israel; and **the expeditions** of Him [were] **from the beginning**, out of **days of the age**.*

The Septuagint was translated from the Hebrew text as it existed before Christ was born (prior to the Hebrew text being in the custody of the later unbelieving Jewish scholars). It was translated into Greek by Temple priest-scribes before Israel’s rejection of Jesus Christ. Consequently, this version alone gives us both the most ancient reading as well as the unbiased Jewish scholarly understanding of the Hebrew text of this passage prior to the Christian era. It is not tainted by anti-Christian bias.

³ Gen. 1:5

⁴ Rev. 3:14 (LGV)

⁵ Col. 1:15 (LGV)

⁶ My translation. Some of the English translations of the LXX have also been skewed due to Trinitarian bias.

Where the Hebrew (Masoretic) Text has “*from of old*” (which is not very specific regarding time vs. eternity), the LXX has “ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς” (from the beginning), exactly the clause in 1 John 1:1 and 1 John 2:13-4 which John applied to Jesus,⁷ who was ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς (from the beginning).

Where the Hebrew has “*from ancient days*” (JPS) and “*from the days of antiquity*” (YLT), the LXX has ἐξ ἡμερῶν αἰῶνος “*out of days of the age.*”

It is significant that many Christian versions omit the word “days” altogether, even though it is in both the Hebrew and Greek texts. It is also significant that terminology which clearly refers to finite time (such as “age”) is ignored and replaced with English words that refer to timelessness, “eternity” or “everlasting.” This mistranslation of the text is driven by Trinitarian bias.

Finally, for a proper understanding of this verse it is critical to notice that both the Hebrew יִהְיֶה מִצֵּדֹתַי and the Greek LXX ἔξοδοι “*goings forth*” (or “*comings forth*”) are plural nouns, referring to multiple excursions or repeated past expeditions. However, Micah prophesied that in the future Messiah would “*go forth*” (singular - once) from Bethlehem to be the Messiah, the ruler in Israel.

The Greek word ἔξοδοι (exodoi) is the plural of ἔξοδος (exodos). This is the word used many times of the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt. It is also used many times of people leaving a particular place, or of a particular king “*going forth*” to war against another nation.⁸ This is why I translated ἔξοδοι in Micah 5:2 as “*expeditions.*” It refers to leaving a place for a particular reason or mission. The plural form implies that Messiah left and returned multiple times in the past.

What is abundantly clear from this passage is that the one who was to “*go forth*” from Bethlehem has been on multiple “*expeditions*” previously, ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς (from the beginning”), and ἐξ ἡμερῶν αἰῶνος “*out of days of the age.*” “*The beginning*” refers to creation and “*days of the age*” refers to the period of time from creation to the birth of Christ. Therefore, the one to go forth from Bethlehem as the Messiah is the same one who has been sent on many previous expeditions. However, this passage says nothing at all about His existing before the creation, only “*from the beginning.*”

Who is it that has ascended and descended from heaven on multiple expeditions from God to mankind? It was “*the Messenger of the LORD.*” Here is one of several examples:

⁷ The same writer places Satan ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς “*from the beginning*” (John 8:44; 1 John 3:8).

⁸ Ex. 2 Chron. 16:1

Judges 13:15-22 (NKJV) 15 Then Manoah said to the Angel of the LORD, "Please let us detain You, and we will prepare a young goat for You." 16 And the Angel of the LORD said to Manoah, "Though you detain Me, I will not eat your food. But if you offer a burnt offering, you must offer it to the LORD." (For Manoah did not know He was the Angel of the LORD.) 17 Then Manoah said to the Angel of the LORD, "What is Your name, that when Your words come to pass we may honor You?" 18 And the Angel of the LORD said to him, "Why do you ask My name, seeing it is wonderful?" 19 So Manoah took the young goat with the grain offering, and offered it upon the rock to the LORD. And He did a wondrous thing while Manoah and his wife looked on – 20 it happened as the flame went up toward heaven from the altar – the **Angel of the LORD ascended** in the flame of the altar! When Manoah and his wife saw this, they fell on their faces to the ground. 21 When the Angel of the LORD appeared no more to Manoah and his wife, then Manoah knew that He was the Angel of the LORD. 22 And Manoah said to his wife, "We shall surely die, because **we have seen God!**"

Several times in the Old Testament when people are said to have encountered the Messenger of the LORD they then claimed to have seen God.⁹ Yet the New Testament is quite emphatic that "No one has seen God at any time."¹⁰ Paul calls the Father "the invisible God"¹¹ and "Him who is invisible."¹² Jesus Himself said to the Jews, "And the Father Himself, who sent Me, has testified of Me. You have neither heard His voice at any time, nor seen His form."¹³ John was quite emphatic that it was the Son who appeared in ancient times. "No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him."¹⁴ These pre-human appearances of the Son of God on earth as "the Messenger of the LORD" are the many "expeditions" (in Micah 5:2) on which God sent Him to mankind "from the beginning" and "out of days of the age," prior to His human birth in Bethlehem. Solomon tells us that this was God's Son.

*Prov. 30:4 (NKJV) 4 **Who has ascended into heaven, or descended?** Who has gathered the wind in His fists? Who has bound the waters in a garment? Who has established all the ends of the earth? What is His name, and **what is His Son's name**, If you know?*

The first bold statement asks the critical question, "Who has ascended into heaven, or descended?" To help provide the answer, Solomon then asks the obvious, "Who has gathered the wind in His fists? Who has bound the waters in a garment? Who has established all

⁹ Ex. Gen. 16:6-13

¹⁰ 1 John 4:12 (NKJV)

¹¹ Col. 1:15 (NKJV)

¹² Heb. 11:3 (NKJV)

¹³ John 5:37 (NKJV)

¹⁴ John 1:18 (NKJV)

the ends of the earth?" The Jews knew His name, it is YHVH (Yahweh) which means "self-existing one." But then Solomon provides the answer to the original question by asking the following rhetorical question, "What is His Son's name, if you know?" This riddle was Solomon's response to Agur the son of Jakeh (vs. 1), who had said to Ithiel and Ucal, "Surely I am more stupid than any man, And do not have the understanding of a man. I neither learned **Wisdom**, nor have knowledge of **the Holy One**." Agur was confessing his ignorance about Proverbs 8:22-31, where "Wisdom" is portrayed as having been begotten out of God at the beginning of creation, and working alongside God as a "master-craftsman" in forming the creation. Solomon provided the answer here in the form of a riddle. The one who ascended and descended was the Son of God according to Solomon.

This same "Son of God" was sent on another expedition to protect Daniel's three friends from the fiery furnace into which Nebuchadnezzar had them thrown.

*Daniel. 3:24-25, 28 (NKJV) 4 Then King Nebuchadnezzar was astonished; and he rose in haste and spoke, saying to his counselors, "Did we not cast three men bound into the midst of the fire?" They answered and said to the king, "True, O king." 25 "Look!" he answered, "I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire; and they are not hurt, and the form of the fourth is like **the Son of God**." ... 28 Nebuchadnezzar spoke, saying, "Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, who sent **His Angel** and delivered His servants who trusted in Him, ...*

Even Nebuchadnezzar understood that the "Messenger of the LORD," of the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, was the Son of God.¹⁵ No doubt he had heard from Daniel his adviser about the "Son of God" who descends and ascends from heaven as the "Messenger of the Lord."

The One who gave the Law also descended to Mt. Sinai and ascended into heaven according to the following Psalm.

*Psalm 68:17 (NKJV) 17 The chariots of God are twenty thousand, Even thousands of thousands; The **Lord is among them as in Sinai**, in the Holy Place. 18 **You have***

¹⁵ Some translations incorrectly render this as "a son of the gods." The Hebrew term "Elohim" is spelled the same whether it is singular or plural. However, the LXX shows plainly that the Temple scribes understood this as the God of Israel because they translated it as υἱὸς θεοῦ (Son of God - singular). This interpretation is also affirmed by the Hebrew because Nebuchadnezzar then blessed "the God of Shadrach, Meshack, and Abednego who sent His Messenger and delivered His servants." Thus both the Hebrew and LXX indicate that Nebuchadnezzar understood that this was both the Messenger of the LORD and the Son of God, not a son of the pagan gods which his people worshipped.

ascended on high, You have led captivity captive; You have received gifts among men, Even from the rebellious, That the LORD God might dwell there.

The one who gave the Law on Mt Sinai according to Steven was the Messenger of the LORD (singular) who also appeared in the burning bush.¹⁶ Paul applied the above Psalm to Jesus as the “Lord” who was accompanied by many thousands of angels of God present on Mt. Sinai when the Law was given.

Eph. 4:7-10 (NKJV) 7 But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ’s gift. 8 Therefore He says: “When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, And gave gifts to men.”¹⁷ 9 (Now this, “He ascended” – what does it mean but that He also first descended into the lower parts of the earth?¹⁸ 10 He who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things.)

John wrote the following concerning the Son’s expedition to earth to redeem mankind, borrowing language from Proverbs 30:4.

John 3:13 (NKJV) 13 No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven.

Notice that both Paul and John stated that the Son descended from heaven before He ascended to the Father’s right hand.

The prophet Micah declared in plain and unmistakable language both the preexistence of the Messiah from the beginning of the creation and His expeditions on which His Father sent him, ascending and descending from heaven. There is one final expedition of the Son of God from heaven, as Son of Man, to reign as King.

¹⁶ Acts 7:30-35,38

¹⁷ Paul’s quotation of Psalm 68:17 differs from our copies in that it states that He **gave gifts to men** while our copies of this Psalm have He **received gifts from men**. However, Justin Martyr quoted Psalm 68:18 from an older copy of the LXX exactly as Paul quoted it here, showing that Paul’s quotation is correct and is the more ancient reading (Justin, Dialogue, ch. 39). The Talmud interpreted this Psalm as referring to Moses’ ascent of Mount Sinai to receive the Law (Babylonian Talmud, Sabbath, Folio 88b-89a), but Paul interpreted it as the Son’s ascent to heaven.

¹⁸ The “lowest parts of the earth” refers to the womb of Mary. As Messiah speaking, David wrote: “For You formed my inward parts; You covered me in my mother’s womb. I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Marvelous are Your works, And that my soul knows very well. My frame was not hidden from You, When I was made in secret, And skillfully wrought in **the lowest parts of the earth**” (Psalm 139:13-15 NKJV).

Daniel 7: 9-10, 13-14 (NKJV) 9 "I watched till thrones were put in place, And the Ancient of Days was seated; His garment was white as snow, And the hair of His head was like pure wool. His throne was a fiery flame, Its wheels a burning fire; 10 A fiery stream issued And came forth from before Him. A thousand thousands ministered to Him; Ten thousand times ten thousand stood before Him. The court was seated, And the books were opened. ... 13 I was watching in the night visions, And behold, One like the Son of Man, Coming with the clouds of heaven! He came to the Ancient of Days, And they brought Him near before Him. 14 Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, That all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, Which shall not pass away, And His kingdom the one Which shall not be destroyed."