A CLOSER LOOK AT MATT 2:6 AND ITS OLD TESTAMENT SOURCES

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The identification of midrashic exegesis in the NT is a sensitive subject to be sure. In a recent article Homer Heater[1] challenges Moises Silva's[2] classification of Matt 2:6 as one possible example. He specifically takes issue with Silva's assertion that "whether or not we can give persuasive reasons why Matthew seems to alter the text, the fact remains that such use of Scripture is foreign to us."[3] Heater questions whether the Jewish community was "abusing" the Bible by quoting it in the manner that they did (which, he notes, Matthew evidently approved of since he makes no explicit attempt to correct the quotation). He argues that the scribes were not quoting Mic 5:1 [English versions 5:2, and throughout this article]; they were utilizing "cumulative exegesis" from three OT passages. (The passages are Mic 5:1, the most immediate link in the chain; 2 Sam 5:2,[4] which is appended to the quotation of Micah; and Gen 49:10,[5] which starts the whole process of cumulative exegesis.)

Heater's examination, however, is rather selective. He correctly observes that the Targum on Mic 5:1 has "Messiah" for the MT "ruler" and that the end of the "quotation" of the prophet comes from 2 Sam 5:2, where the idea of "shepherding" serves to link the two passages. He further states that by rendering "clan" by "leader" the scribes "are not playing games with '*l(w)py*.'" In a note, Heater cites Gundry's explanation that "clan" should be taken as a personification, and therefore a repointing is unnecessary.[6]

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[1] H. Heater, "Matthew 2:6 and Its Old Testament Sources," *JETS* 26 (1983) 395-397.

[2] M. Silva, "Ned B. Stonehouse and Redaction Criticism. Part Two: The Historicity of the Synoptic Tradition," *WTJ* 40 (1977-78) 281-303.

[3] Ibid., p. 294.

[4] It should be pointed out that the quotation of 2 Sam 5:2 is not a one-for-one translation of the MT by Matthew (nor a quotation of the LXX, which follows what has come down to us as the MT). Matthew, in order to bring this quotation into accord with the rest of the citation, makes the necessary change from the second-person singular *poimaneis* to the third-person singular *poimanei*.

[5] Heater ("Matthew" 395) notes the targumic interpretation of Gen 49:10—i.e., that the "messiah" is the ruler mentioned in place of "Shiloh" of the MT.

[6] R. Gundry, *The Use of the Old Testament in St. Matthew's Gospel* (Leiden: Brill, 1975) 92. Gundry more recently remarks: "By supplying different vowels to the Hebrew consonantal text, Matthew reads 'rulers' instead of 'thousands' or 'clans.' . . . Thus he personifies the clans, just as Bethlehem has already been personified" (R. Gundry, *Matthew, A Commentary on His Literary and Theological Art* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982] 29).

Other items in the text of Matthew require explanation, and a closer look at those items that Heater addresses warrants a modification of what has been stated. First, Heater has overlooked the substitution of "land of Judah" for "Ephrathah" of the MT. The phrase is influenced by both geographical considerations and tradition: "Now David was the son of the Ephrathite of Bethlehem in Judah" (1 Sam 17:12; cf. Ruth 1:2; Luke 2:4). It is also influenced by the phrase *tēs Ioudaias* in vv 1, 5. In the context of Matthew 2 the phrase emphasizes the kingship of Jesus through the line of Judah (cf. Matt 1:2; Gen 49:10).[7]

Second, the insignificance of Bethlehem ("small among the thousands of Judah") is transformed by Matthew into a statement of its importance by the insertion of the emphatic negative particle. Soares-Prabhu argues that *oudamōs* is most likely dependent on a non-MT *Vorlage*, which read *ṣ'yr lō' lhywt*.[8] Moreover, he rejects the possibility that Matthew is paraphrasing because nothing is added to Matthew's Christological exegesis.

The paraphrasing of this particular phrase, however, had already begun. The LXX can be read as a question: "Are you too few . . .?" More importantly the Targum adds the qualifying particle *k* before *z'yr*.[9] The wording of Micah seems to be deliberate: The contrast between the obscure, insignificant town of Bethlehem and its future importance as the birthplace of the coming "ruler" with the implicit theme, found so often in the OT, of God working through the humblest of human capabilities is clear (cf. e.g. 1 Sam 9:21). Matthew simply draws upon early Jewish exegesis, as evident in the Targum and (perhaps) LXX, in order to transform the contrast, as implied in the MT of Micah, into a positive statement that what Micah had predicted has now come to pass—Bethlehem is no longer insignificant but is renowned inasmuch as the "Messiah" has now been born.[10] The rendering by Matthew, then, does have Christological importance (*contra* Soares-Prabhu): "Rather, for Matthew the birth of Jesus has transformed Bethlehem from the unimportant village it was at the time of Micah's prediction into the supremely important birthplace of the messianic king from David's line."[11]

Only in Matthew do we find "ruler" for *'lpy* (not in the versions), which would seem to require simply repointing the vowels of the MT. What is the basis for this rendering? In addition to the possible confusion of the vowels, we must not overlook the personification of Bethlehem in the initial stichos of the verse. Neither

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[7]Cf. Gundry, *Matthew* 29; G. Soares-Prabhu, *The Formular Quotations in the Infancy Narrative of Matthew* (Rome: Biblical Institute, 1976) 262-263; R. Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1977) 184. Gundry further argues that "land of Judah" testifies to Matthew's "typically Jewish land-consciousness." "Land of Judah" could also represent a contemporizing of "Ephrathah"; cf. Gundry, ibid.; P. Gaechter, *Das Matthäus-Evangelium* (Innsbruck: Tyrolia, 1964) 63; W. Grundmann, *Das Evangelium nach Matthäus* (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1973) 78.

[8]Soares-Prabhu, *Formular* 263; cf. also E. Lohmeyer, *Das Evangelium des Matthäus* (ed. W. Schmauch; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1967) 23.

[9]Vg *parvulus es* and Syriac *z'wry' 'nt* follow neither the LXX nor Targum but stand closer to the MT.

[10]Cf. Gundry, *Matthew* 29; Grundmann, *Evangelium* 78.

[11]Gundry, *Matthew* 29; cf. also Brown, *Birth* 185, who thinks this may be a deliberate Christian change rather than a variant reading.

should we rule out the influence from the stylized phraseology of the OT itself—"heads of the clans of Israel," as in Num 1:6; Josh 22:21 and other passages.

The versions are of little help here. The Targum is quite literal—"thousands" (*b'lpy'*)—and even adds "to be numbered" after the corresponding infinitive to *lhywt*. LXX, Syriac and Vg similarly have "thousands," though they differ from the Targum and MT in other respects. Two questions arise, then: What significance does *b'lpy* have in the Mican text? And what effect does Matthew's rendering make in his text?

Taking the latter question first, we find that in Matthew the phrase serves to link the Mican passage with 2 Sam 5:2, where the LXX employs *hēgoumenon* (MT *ngyd*) in reference to David.[12,13] It also establishes Jesus' superiority over his predecessors,[14] just as the addition of "land of Judah" does in the previous stichos. Therefore, whether Matthew is influenced by stylized phraseology, personification, or confusion of the vowels—none of which appear in the versions—the rendering functions as both a literary and theological connection between the passages cited and within the pericope itself.

The former question, the significance this has in the Mican passage, is not as easily answered. Several options have been put forth: Nicholas de Lyra,[15] Calmet[16] and Pococke[17] are among those who follow the lead of the NT by saying that *b'lpy* refers to rulers. Others, such as Theophylakt,[18] Rashi[19] and Keil,[20] say that it refers to families or clans and thus is a personification of sorts. Other possibilities offered are that it refers to the number of people (Rosenmüller[21]), cities (Kimchi[22]) or districts (Rudolph,[23] *gauen;* citing 1 Sam 23:23).

The significance cannot be answered apart from the context, specifically the significance of "Bethlehem Ephrathah." Clearly the connection with Davidic tra-

[12]The LXX uses *hēgemōn* for *'lp* in Genesis and Chronicles but never in the prophets. In Jeremiah *hēgemōn* translates *śr*.

[13]The entire phrase in the LXX reads: *kai su esei hēgoumenon epi ton laon mou Israēl.*

[14]Cf. Gundry, *Matthew* 29, who adds: "Later, in his account of Jesus' passion and resurrection, Matthew will interject the designation of Pilate as *hēgemōn* eight times. By using the same word in his quotation of Mic 5:1, the evangelist makes Jesus Pilate's superior, too, the true governor of Judah."

[15]N. de Lyra, *Postilla Super Totam Bibliam* (Nuremberg: 1493).

[16]A. Calmet, *Commentaire Litéral Sur Tous Les Livres de L'Ancien et du Nouveau Testament* (vol. 17; Paris: 1819).

[17]E. Pococke, *Theological Works* (vol. 1; London: 1740).

[18]Theophylakt, *Expositio in Prophetam Michaeam* (vol. 126; PG).

[19]Rashi, in *Miqra'ot Gedolot* (Jerusalem, n.d.).

[20]C. F. Keil, *Biblical Commentary on the Twelve Minor Prophets* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1868).

[21]E. F. C. Rosenmüller, *Scholia in Vetus Testamentum* (Leipzig: 1827-1835).

[22]Kimchi, in *Miqra'ot Gedolot* (Jerusalem, n.d.).

[23]W. Rudolph, *Micha-Nahum-Habakuk-Zephanja* (Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1975).

ditions and motifs is evident, as we noted above. But the place names are not limited by this obvious connection. Commentators often argue that "Ephrathah" is used to distinguish Bethlehem in Judah from the Bethlehem mentioned in Josh 19:15: "And Kattah, Nahalal, Shimron, Idalah, and Bethlehem [are the inheritance of Zebulun]" (cf. Kimchi, Calvin[24] and Rudolph). However, the reference to "Judah" in the following stichos makes it superfluous to say that Ephrathah is used to distinguish one Bethlehem from another.

"Ephrathah" is best viewed as an archaic poetic form. It is written both with the feminine or *h*-locale ending (e.g. Gen 35:19), or without it (e.g. 48:7), though the former predominates. The termination -$\bar{a}t\hat{a}$ is often found in poetry with feminines, and the -$\hat{a}$ termination is found in other place names (cf. Deut 10:7: "From there they travelled to Gudgodah, and from Gudgodah to Jotbathah").[25] Moreover the place names Ephrathah and Bethlehem are closely associated in the patriarchal genealogies (1 Chr 2:19, 24, 50; 4:4) as well as the patriarchal narratives. The meaning that emerges then is this: The new ruler will have his roots in the place and family of David and, perhaps more importantly, these roots even stretch back into patriarchal history.

If we are correct in seeing "Bethlehem Ephrathah" as an archaic poetic reference to Bethlehem that recalls the patriarchal traditions concerning families (clans) in the region, then "among the thousands" is a reference to the divisions of the clans. This use is seen in 1 Sam 10:19: "Now present yourselves before the Lord, according to your tribes (*lšbṭykm*) and your clans (*l'lpykm*)."[26]

The theology reflected in Mic 5:1 is "anti-Jerusalemite": Note the contrast between Zion in the previous verse, whose leaders ("judges") are humiliated, and Bethlehem in this verse, whose leader will be of great renown (5:3). There is also an implied stance over against monarchal succession. We need not go so far as James Mays, who asserts that the emphasis on David's origin "explicitly ignores the Davidic succession and revises the terms of Nathan's founding oracle (2 Sam 7:4-17)."[27] The Mican oracle does not deny a successor to David's throne: Compare *yṣ' mmk ly* ("he will go forth from you to me") with 2 Sam 7:12, *'šr yṣ' mm'yk* ("who will go forth from your body"). Furthermore, the Mican oracle picks up on a significant part of Nathan's prophecy: "When he commits iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men [cf. Mic 4:14], with the stripes of the sons of men" (2 Sam 7:14). The Mican oracle does suggest a new work by Yahweh, but not *ex nihilo;* the work is founded on the promise to David. It is also an affirmation that God can once again work through humble means, as he did with David, and is not dependent on the royal city and household, which has so deteriorated.

Matthew picks up on several of these Davidic motifs but ignores the patriarchal or clan motifs—that is, he picks up on what is important for his purposes and even goes beyond his text to show the full significance of Jesus' birth.

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[24]J. Calvin, *Commentaries on the Twelve Minor Prophets* (vol. 2; Grand Rapids: Baker, reprint 1979).

[25]GKC §90g, h.

[26]"Clans" is used in a general, nontechnical sense to designate bonding but not necessarily kinship.

[27]J. L. Mays, *Micah* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976).

Finally, Matthew omits "to me" of the MT in the following stichos. The omis-sion comes as a general shortening of the phrase (cf. the omission of "in Israel" as well) and enables Matthew to bring in the quotation of 2 Sam 5:2 where *mou* fulfills the same function as *ly* in Mic 5:1. Matthew employs *hēgoumenos* to trans-late *mwšl* (contrast LXX, *archonta*), which draws attention to the passage in 2 Samuel as well as reinforcing Matthew's apologetic of Jesus' regal claim.[28]

The foregoing discussion discloses that the Matthean citation is neither a quo-tation of the LXX of Mic 5:1 nor a literal translation of the MT. Several explana-tions are possible. First, the possibility that Matthew is dependent on a non-MT *Vorlage* has been argued by Soares-Prabhu. Another possibility is that Matthew is utilizing a different Greek translation from the LXX[29] or is basing his transla-tion on other Jewish interpretations.[30] However, at every point of divergence from the text that has come down to us as the MT, a Christological point is made, or made more explicit, by Matthew. The rather obvious Christological emphasis suggests that Matthew himself is theologizing in this passage. To be sure, Mat-thew draws upon the same influences that appear in the Targum (the explicit messianic interpretation of the passage as a whole and the understanding of "small" as a contrast between what it appears to be and what it will be), but he is not afraid to go beyond these influences, as can be seen in his substitution of "land of Judah" for "Ephrathah" and his understanding of "thousands" as "rulers." Concerning this text Stendahl concluded: "Yet this does not mean that Matthew had a Hebrew text other than the MT. His different reading should rather be understood as an *ad hoc* interpretation of the MT's consonantal text."[31] To this we add that the *ad hoc* interpretation shows a blending of midrashic and Christological exegesis. Matthew is not merely translating; he is reinterpreting while he translates.

We would not deny that there is an element of "cumulative exegesis" in Mat-thew's citation. This is evident from the fact that two passages are brought to-gether and that the Mican passage is given an explicitly messianic interpretation in the Targum, though it lacks the adjective *mšyḥ* in the Hebrew text. What is the nature of this exegesis? Is there something about the literary character that speaks against its being midrashic? Is there something in its content that miti-gates against this? In what sense is saying that the passage is representative of cumulative exegesis any better than saying it is midrashic? Is it better descrip-tively or theologically? To be sure, defining midrash is difficult, but by adding another term we are not necessarily clarifying the problem. Whatever else mi-drashic exegesis is, it has its point of departure in the text itself, amplifying it for

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[28]Gundry, *Matthew* 29.

[29]Cf. Lohmeyer, *Evangelium* 23-24.

[30]Cf. A. Baumstark, "Die Zitate des Mt-Evangeliums aus dem Zwölfprophetenbuch," *Bib* 37 (1956) 296-313, who argues that Matthew's non-LXX quotations when they differ from the MT have parallels with the Targum and that his *Vorlage* here is dependent on a lost targum similar to the *Vorlage* of the Samaritan Pentateuch.

[31]K. Stendahl, *The School of St. Matthew and Its Use of the Old Testament* (Lund: Gleerup, 1954) 166.

a new generation to bring out the full significance of the text as the Word of God.[32]

We may eventually reject "midrash" as a descriptive term for Matthew's (or any other NT author's) exegesis. The affinities with midrash, and the utilization of midrashic exegesis, are evident. However, Matthew does not simply give an exposition of a text but draws upon a whole tradition of texts and interpretations for the purpose of proclaiming the "gospel," the fulfillment of God's redemptive purposes in Jesus Christ. What are the constitutive elements of midrashic exegesis? Does the Christological prophecy-fulfillment motif stretch these elements beyond what can be reasonably recognized as "midrash"? Only through a close inspection of the text and comparison with other texts will these and similar questions be answered.

In sum, the departures in this single citation of the OT text are more drastic than Heater would have us believe, and cumulative exegesis does not explain these divergences. In arguing against Silva, Heater employs the rather loaded term "abusing," which Silva does not use. In fact Silva's point is quite the opposite: It is not that the rabbis, Matthew, or even modern-day preachers are "abusing" the text; it is whether we are introducing foreign ideas into our exegesis of a text by imposing modern canons of historical criticism, be they liberal or conservative. We must admit that Matthew's citation goes beyond the OT passage. This need not be a value judgment on Matthew's use of the OT; it simply recognizes an obvious fact and allows the text to speak for itself. As Silva himself concludes his article: "Rather than assuming what the biblical writers may or may not have said, let us devote ourselves to an honest exegesis of documents themselves, allowing them to determine our understanding of their character."[33]

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[32]Cf. esp. R. Bloch, "Midrash," in *Approaches to Ancient Judaism* (ed. W. S. Green [Missoula: Scholars, 1978]) 29-50, among the many works available on midrash in recent years.

[33]Silva, "Ned B. Stonehouse" 303. Under the section "History and Midrash" Silva states: "The main burden of my article is to insist that our methodology should arise out of careful exegesis of the documents themselves, not out of modern critical theories. . . . [the] position must be exegetically established, not assumed" (291 n. 14).