

The Little Town of Bethlehem

(Compiled by Paul R. Blake from multiple Internet sources)

Introduction:

- A. Bethlehem - Arabic: Bayt Laḥm “House of Meat”; Hebrew: Bet Leḥem “House of Bread”; Koine Greek: Βηθλεέμ Beth le em.
 - 1. Bethlehem is a Palestinian city located in the central West Bank, neighbor to south Jerusalem, with a population of 25,000 people
 - 2. It is part of the Governorate of the Palestinian Authority. The economy today is primarily tourism.
- B. The Bible identifies Bethlehem as the city of David. The New Testament identifies Bethlehem as the birthplace of Jesus.
 - 1. Canaanite period - A historical reference to the town appears in the Amarna Letters (1400 BC) when Abdi-Heba, the local governor of Jerusalem during the Amarna period, appeals to the Pharaoh of Egypt, for help in retaking "Bit-Lahmi" in the wake of disturbances by the Apiru.
 - 2. Center of worship for Lachmo, the Akkadian god of fertility. The town was known as Beit Lachama, meaning "House of Lachama."
 - 3. William F. Albright notes that the pronunciation of the name remained essentially the same for 3,500 years, but has meant different things: 'Temple of the God Lakhmu' in Canaanite, 'House of Bread' in Hebrew and Aramaic, 'House of Meat' in Arabic."
- C. Israelite and Judean period
 - 1. Original name was Ephrath, meaning fertile or fruitful place - Micah 5:2
 - 2. Was where Rachel was buried - Gen. 48:7
 - 3. Was Naomi's home town and where Ruth gleaned grain in the fields of Boaz - Ruth 1:1-2, 2:4-10
 - 4. Was where Samuel went to anoint David of the house of Jesse to be king - 1Sam. 16:1
 - 5. Was where the Philistines had a fort and three of David's best warriors went to get water from the well right next to the gate. David would not drink it, but gave it to God instead - 2Sam. 23:13-17
 - 6. Was the site of Jesus' advent into this world - Matt. 2:1
 - a. Justin Martyr, who stated in his Dialogue with Trypho (155–161 AD) that the family had taken refuge in a cave outside of the town used to pen animals at night.
 - b. Origen of Alexandria in 247, referred to a cave in the town of Bethlehem which local people used to shelter livestock at night from wild animals, as the birthplace of Jesus.
 - 7. Is believed to be the place where Ezekiel, Asaph, Job, and Jesse were buried (4th century; Pilgrim of Bordeaux)
- D. The town stands at an elevation of about a half mile above sea level, 100 feet higher than Jerusalem.
 - 1. It is 45 miles northeast of the Mediterranean Sea and 6 miles south of Jerusalem.

I. LITTLE TOWN, WORLD CHANGING EVENT

- A. He who enjoyed the glory and power of heaven, became poor and humble in an animal shelter in a small country town - 2Cor. 8:9; Micah 5:2
1. Contrast the glory of heaven with the squalor of Bethlehem.
- B. Why did Jesus come to this world? Why would He willingly leave Heaven with all its glory to live in this sin burdened world? Why would He die for people who cared nothing for Him?
1. To reveal the invisible God - John 1:18, 14:9
 2. To fulfill prophecy - Gen. 3:15
 3. To be a sacrifice for our sins - Heb. 2:9, 10:4-5, 10-12; Mark 10:45
 4. To re-unite man and God - 2Cor. 5:19; 1Tim. 2:5-6
 5. To provide an example for believers - 1Peter 2:21; 1John 2:6
 6. To provide believers with a high priest - Heb. 2:17, 3:1, 4:14
 7. To destroy the Adversary and his works - Heb. 2:14; 1John 3:8
 8. To undo the human predicament - Rom. 5:12; 1Cor. 15:21
 9. To heal the broken hearted - Luke 4:18-21
 10. To give abundant, fulfilling life - John 10:10
 11. To glorify the Father - John 13:31, 17:4
 12. To comfort us as we travel toward Heaven - Heb. 4:15-16
- C. What saith the word?
1. Isa. 7:14 - "Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel"
 2. Micah 5:2 - "But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting."
 3. Luke 2:1-14 - "And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed. 2 (And this taxing was first made when Quirinius was governor of Syria. And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judaea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; because he was of the house and lineage of David: To be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child. And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn. And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men."

4. Matt. 2:1 - "Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem"
 5. Luke 2:16 - "And they came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger."
 6. Matt. 2:11 - "And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh."
 7. Matt. 2:16 - "Then Herod, when he saw that he was mocked of the wise men, was exceeding wroth, and sent forth, and slew all the children that were in Bethlehem, and in all the coasts thereof, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had diligently enquired of the wise men."
 8. John 7:42 - "Has not the Scripture said that the Christ comes from the seed of David and from the town of Bethlehem, where David was?"
- D. In the final analysis, Jesus came to Bethlehem as a baby because He loved us and wanted to give His life a ransom for our sins.
1. He came to our home for a short time so that we can go to His home forever - John 14:1-3