

BIBLE PLACES

BETHLEHEM

Most certainly the biggest event to happen in Bethlehem was the birth of the Messiah. Any Jewish student of Scripture knew that Bethlehem was THE place it would happen. That is why when the people mistakenly thought Jesus was born in Nazareth, they were sure He could not be the Messiah. Bethlehem was where their revered David had been born and had humbly shepherded before being called to be king.

The Hebrew translation of Bethlehem is Bet Lehem and means “House of Bread”. In Arabic it is Bet Lahm, meaning “House of Meat or Flesh” Both of those seem pretty significant as the birthplace of Christ.

It might seem unlikely that such a small town would give birth to the King, but it wasn’t the first time it would happen! It also wouldn’t be the first time that God worked something GRAND from something small and insignificant.

We have all grown up with certain images of the birth of Christ that are likely only loosely connected to the reality. We have our notions about what a stable, manger, inn, and all the other terms surrounding the nativity “scene” look like. We have a time of year that we have assumed for the birth of Christ, who had to have been born on Christmas, right? But, what if we were an inhabitant of Bethlehem, or anywhere in Israel on that blessed night over 2000 years ago? What would our perceptions have been, and what would our assumptions be when we read the account of Christ’s birth?

“The Word became flesh and dwelled among us. John 1:14

The timing of Jesus’ birth is significant to it’s location. From a close look at Scripture, we can make a good guess about when that would have been. Zechariah was taking his turn ministering in the temple the week of Sivan 12 to 18. 40 weeks for a normal pregnancy would put the arrival of John the Baptist on, or close to Passover. How much time later was Jesus conceived according to Luke 1:24-33? _____

That would happen to be around the time of Hanukkah, the festival of lights. Nine months later would be the approximate time of the Feast of Tabernacles in early fall. What did the Feast of Tabernacles commemorate, and how was it observed according to Lev. 23:33-43? _____

During this Festival, when Jews streamed to Jerusalem, nearby Bethlehem would have been catching the overflow of people. Succoth booths would have been set up everywhere. Rooftop “guest rooms” would have been full. And here comes the Christ child, to this small little town, to dwell (tabernacle) among His flock.



BORN IN A STABLE

Bethlehem, at the time of Jesus' birth was a small town of less than 1,000 people. There were no inns, at least not as we would recognize. The strong Middle Eastern code of hospitality would make sure that people opened up their homes to the stream of relatives and strangers coming into town for the census, and for the Feast of the Tabernacle ritual visit to Jerusalem. The homes had a room to the back or on the roof specially designated for guests. That does not contradict the meaning of the Greek word for inn, *kataloomah*, which means a lodging place, or a guestchamber. This is a different word than the one used for the place the Good Samaritan took the beaten man, "*pandocheion*", or the place that receives all... a commercial inn. *Kataloomah* is the word that Jesus uses for the upper room where he shared the last Passover with His disciples (Luke 22:10-12). It was the guest room built above the house, like the one the widow shared with Elijah.

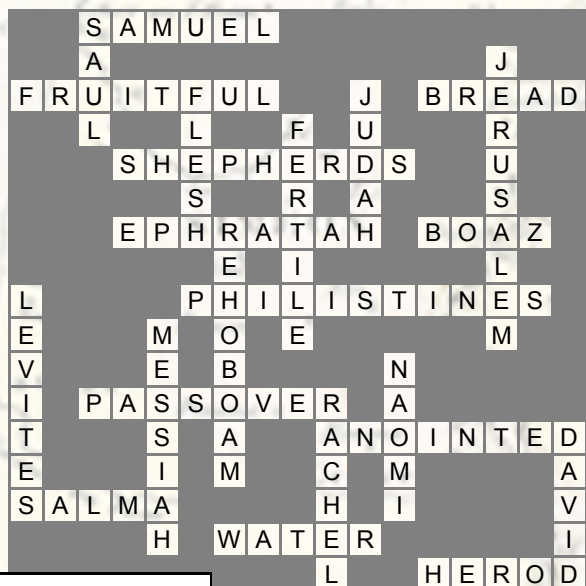


Where the family lived in the typical home was just one room. At the front, near the door, was where the animals stayed at night, both to keep them safe, and to lend their body heat to the people. The manger, also would have been in the home also, often carved into the floor. But the word manger itself (*phatne*) or stall which is how it is translated in Luke 13:15. So if the guest room was full, the next option would have been to be invited to the room where the family, and animals were. What is your reaction to the possibility of this different scene? _____

Read Luke 2:1-7 with this in mind. Do you see any contradiction? _____

There is yet another viable possibility for the birthplace of Jesus based on the prophecy in **Micah 4:7,8**. This theory places the birth of Jesus at the very place that Passover lambs were born. These lambs were raised at Bethlehem by specially trained shepherds who would inspect the lambs and certify them as unblemished for sacrificial use, or release them for common use. The certified lambs are said to be wrapped in swaddling to protect them from blemish. How fitting if it was indeed these shepherds called on to provide approval of this new Passover lamb!

Migdal Eder, or Tower of the Flock, is an ancient watch tower used for protection from enemies and wild animals. Ewes would be brought into this shelter to give birth to the lambs in a ceremonially clean stall. Unlike the normal shepherds who let their sheep graze by day, and brought them into the sheepfold at night, these special herds were kept out 24 hours a day, brought inside only to lamb. Thus the shepherds also had to be out all night. Read Luke 2:8-20 with this information in mind. What different view does this give of the shepherds? _____



Puzzle answers

BETHLEHEM EVENTS

Describe the event or information surrounding Bethlehem in each of these passages:

Gen. 35:16-20 _____

What was Bethlehem's original name in this passage? _____

Judges 19-20 _____

Ruth 1:22, 4:13,21,22 _____

1 Sam. 9:1 _____

1 Sam. 16:1-14 _____

2 Samuel 23:13-17 _____

Who founded Bethlehem according to 1 Chron. 2:51? _____

What did Micah prophesy would happen in this city in Micah 5:2? _____

Who fortified Bethlehem in 928 BC, and for what reason? (2 Chron. 11:6) _____

The first record of mention of Bethlehem outside of the Bible was on a "bulla" (a stamped piece of clay used to seal a document or container) found in 2012 and dating to the 8th-7th centuries BC. It deals with a tax shipment sent from Bethlehem to the king in Jerusalem. What is the significance of such a find? _____

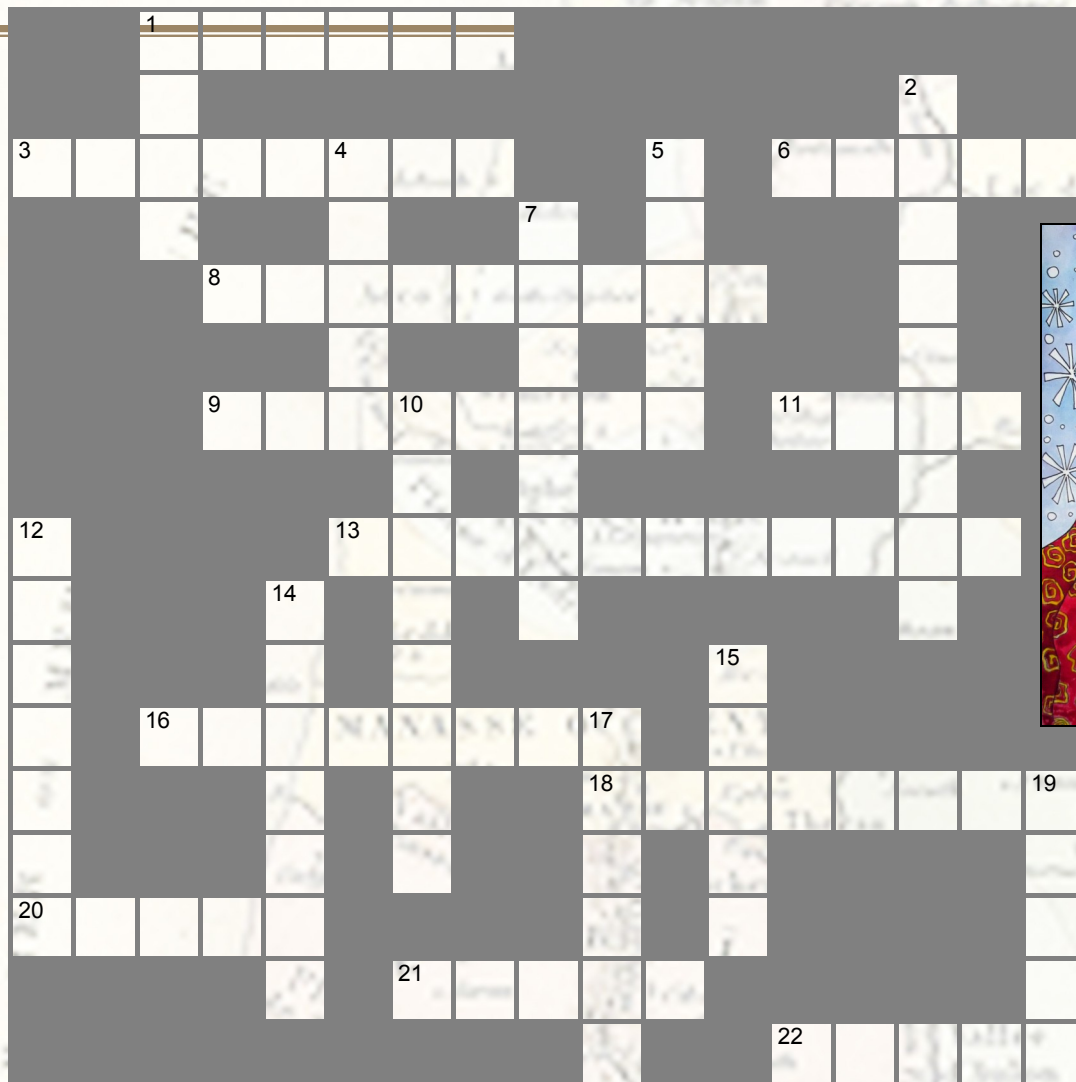
Bethlehem was depopulated by the exile in 586 BC, and not re-inhabited after the return from exile and remained a very small city at the time of the birth of Christ, less than 1,000 people.

What event took place in Bethlehem in Matt. 2:8? _____

Bethlehem was left in ruins by the first century AD. In the 4th century AD, Helena, the mother of Emperor Constantine, visited Bethlehem and determined the location of Christ's birth. The Church of the Nativity was built on this site. The Persians captured Bethlehem in 614, but reportedly left the church unharmed because of the painting inside the church that portrays the wise men of the East in Persian attire.

Today, Bethlehem is a city of around 30,000 people.





Across

- 1 went there to find a king (6)
- 3 meaning of Ephrathah (8)
- 6 means house of _____ (5)
- 8 first to hear news of Jesus' birth (9)
- 9 another name for the town (8)
- 11 lived here (4)
- 13 was in their possession for awhile 2 Sam 23:14 (11)
- 16 lambs for the _____ feast were raised here (8)
- 18 David was _____ here (8)
- 20 city founder (5)
- 21 David longed for some _____ from here 2 Sam. 23:14-16 (5)
- 22 male children killed by his order (5)

Down

- 1 this king was born here 1 Sam. 9:1 (4)
- 2 about 5 miles from this city (9)
- 4 Bethlehem means "house of _____" in Aramaic (5)
- 5 tribe that settled here (5)
- 7 it is in a _____ region (7)
- 10 was fortified by this king of Judah 2 Chron. 11:6 (8)
- 12 apparently many of them resided here (7)
- 14 born here (7)
- 15 hometown of _____ (5)
- 17 was buried near here Gen. 35:19
- 19 born in Bethlehem (5)



Sources:

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- <http://heartofwisdom.com/biblicaltholidays/2014/07/28/birth-of-christ-feast-of-tabernacles/>
- On the tower of migdal eder <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4yXqpalAuQM>
- And by our friend Mark Biltz on when Christ was born <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3w3MNZQXlrs>
- <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/faithwalkers/2012/12/was-jesus-born-away-in-a-manger-at-migdal-eder/>
- Why Bethlehem? http://bereans.com/bible_studies/the_christmas_story_revisit.html