

A BABY CHANGES OUR WORLD

Part 2

Bethlehem and its sheep

Mary looks directly at me. “You are tall and intelligent for your young age and you speak very well, Matthias.”

“Thank you. When we were in the Shepherds Field together, my father taught me scripture and shepherding every day. Our mother teaches us something new every night at home. I love to learn. Also, our Rabbi teaches us in the synagogue school. But sometimes my friends think I know and talk too much, so they don’t want to play with me.”

Joseph overhears us as he repairs the wooden mangers and comments, “It’s more than learning. You have many gifts from God – a good memory, a quick mind, and sensitivity. Early in life you had to learn to work as hard as a man. You are becoming the man of your family. I have not met anyone so young who is so bright. Don’t worry, your friends will understand you better as everyone grows up.”

Mary interposes, “Matthias, I have never been to Bethlehem before, so I’m hopeful you can tell me about this area.”



Fig. 1. Bethlehem in the hills of Judea rises in the background of the flock of sheep and shepherd.

Excitedly, I quickly respond to her request, “I’m always happy to talk about our small town. Bethlehem is located on top of a couple of hills in Judea. Its name means ‘House of Bread’ although some say it means “House of Meat’ because of our sheep sold to the marketplace.”

“My father told me we are next to a trade route that connects with other roads. Traders travel from Egypt in the south, through Judea, and continue up to the Roman Province of Syria in the north. Then they return the same route. Many caravans of traders load their pack animals with goods or even metal ore. That’s why they stop here on their way to or from Jerusalem. So, Bethlehem has this Inn where they can stay overnight to rest and to water and feed their animals for travel.”



Fig. 2. Map of roads and trade routes (---) around Bethlehem, Jerusalem and Nazareth in first century.

Mary gets up and walks over to the entrance of the cave. “The landscape is beautiful. How large is Bethlehem?”

I enjoy answering her questions, “Bethlehem has a small synagogue, and our teacher, Rabbi Levi, says that our town and its surrounding community have a population of about 240 people including children; about 10 boys are born here each year—he knows because he circumcises them according to our Law. He says, ‘Bethlehem is really a rural town about 6 miles south of Jerusalem.’”

I point eastward. “In that beautiful valley which you see in the distance, farmers tell me they grow vegetables, olive trees, barley and hay for sale to us and to the large street markets in Jerusalem.”

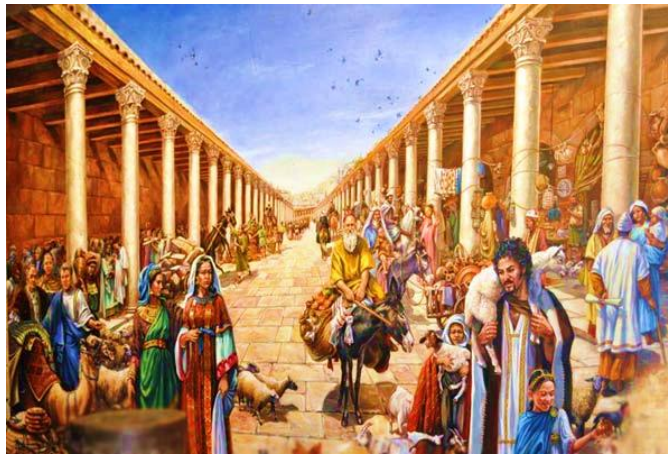


Fig 3. Jerusalem Marketplace.

“The nearby Shepherds Field directly borders the east side of Bethlehem. Its springtime flowers and fall grasses are a beautiful sight also. My friends and I run through the flowers and chase each other just for the fun of it.”

“Rabbi Levi says Bethlehem is best known for its unblemished sheep. God commanded a daily sacrifice of two unblemished lambs. Also, for personal sin offerings in the Jerusalem Temple it was decreed a man is to offer an unblemished lamb as sacrifice to receive forgiveness. So, the Rabbi tells us, many lambs are needed daily and especially during Passover when many faithful come to visit the Temple.”



Fig. 4. Unblemished Lamb.

“Last year my father took me to see the Shepherds Field on the north-east side along the road to Jerusalem. That area contains the flocks that will become the unblemished sacrifices in the Temple. Special, scripture-trained shepherds look at each of the new-born lambs. They’re carefully inspected, separated and protected against blemishes so they can be offered for the daily Temple services.”

“Standing tall in that Shepherds Field is the ‘Tower of the Flock.’ It’s a stone lookout tower and a birthing area. There, new-born lambs are wrapped in swaddling cloth to protect them from any bruises until they are strong enough to endure.”



Fig. 5. A “Tower of the Flock”.

"My father told me that Micah, our prophet, predicted that in this area around the Tower and Bethlehem the Messiah would be born." Mary and Joseph both smile broadly, but say nothing. I wonder what they are thinking.

Next, I point to the south-east. “The Shepherds Field in this other direction contains flocks of sheep grown mainly for their wool to be spun into cloth for our clothes. They are also sold for meat and other products such as parchment.”

“My father grazed his flock in that area. I was always happy when he took me along to stay with him and the flock overnight. So, I know its landscape very well. It’s hilly with many stones and steep craggy drop offs—suited only for grazing of animals. No crops are raised in these areas. The sheep are not allowed to wander into the farmers’ crop areas in the distant valley.”

Joseph has been listening while working and smiles. “You have given Mary an excellent description of Bethlehem and its surroundings. Thank you. They are much the same as I remember when I lived here as a young boy.”

Mary turns to my sister, “Sarah, Matthias says your family lives next to this cave?”

Sarah’s face lights up with excitement as she answers, “Yes. The cave next door is our home. It’s about the same size as yours. There seems to be just enough room for the four of us. We store our few possessions on top of the shelves that were cut out of the rock years before.”



Fig. 6. A mother and 3 children in a cave.

“Normally Mom brings us cooked food that are leftovers from the Inn. When we have something special to cook for ourselves we do it in the open area in front of the cave. There’s a large space in front of these caves, but the ground is made up of bumpy rocks and stones.”

“We use the innkeeper’s fresh straw to cover the rock floor of our home. Mom taught me how to weave and we made some blankets from the wool of our sheep—which we sheared before they were stolen. Our wool has a pretty, light purple tint because Mom adds a little dye to the first wash. At night we pull those cozy blankets under and over us. Mom also made some clothes for us from her weavings and sewing.”

I add my feelings, “But the main thing is we are together—‘very together’ in this small space we call home. And we love each other.”

Joseph laughs. “That you do. Your love and respect for each other and your love of our God is very obvious. Matthias, tell me, have you visited the monument tomb built to honor Rachel?”



Fig. 7. Rachel’s Tomb, Bethlehem area. Drawing perhaps done around 1900. Originally, Jacob placed only a stone pillar as a marker around 1500 B.C. Over the centuries, buildings were constructed to protect and honor this site.

“Yes,” I report, “Several times—when my Dad took us north on the road to Jerusalem for the festivals at the Temple.”

Joseph goes on, “Rachel was the wife of Jacob, our patriarchal ancestor, whom God named ‘Israel.’ As children we used to run up there and after a rest, we would race back here to see who was the fastest!”

I feel good Joseph is sharing his story about Rachel’s memorial and I ask him, “Do you know Mom was named Rachel by her parents when they lived in northern Galilee?”

“We know your mother’s name from the innkeeper who introduced her to us when she offered to help us. Rachel is a beautiful name.”

Mary interposes. “You children speak very well. You will grow up to be wise adults.”

She sighs, “But for now, I’m really thirsty. May I have a drink of water? Suddenly, I’m very tired.”

Sarah jumps up to pour some water for Mary and then passes the water jar to us. This activity awakens Isaac from his nap. He just sits up and laughs.

Joseph helps Mary back into the cave to lie down and rest.

I jump up too, “That reminds me, I promised to take your donkey to the stream to drink some water. I’ll do that now!”

----- **End of Part 2**

(Continue to next page:
Multi-Dimension LINKS)

MULTI – DIMENSION LINKS

Click **Buttons/LINKS** to see and hear interesting Music Videos – Traditional, Modern-New, or Classic versions (on YouTube).



Modern presentation of a traditional Christmas carol with lyrics: “Mary, did you know?”
Sung by Pentatonix.



Popular song: “Like A Shepherd.” Written and sung by Bob Dufford - Saint Louis Jesuits.
With lyrics.



Classic: “The Lord Is My Shepherd” Psalm 23.
Mormon Tabernacle Choir.
Choral Music, Flute, Harp, and Oboe.



Classical: "All we like sheep have gone astray"
From George Frideric Handel's "The Messiah" by The English Concert with Score shown.



Classical: “Sheep May Safely Graze” Cantata No. 208
by J. S. Bach.
Conducted by Eugene Ormandy.

(Continue to next page: **Multi-Dimensions**)

A BABY CHANGES OUR WORLD

Part 2

Bethlehem and its sheep

Multi-Dimensions: Click **Buttons/LINKS** to experience Tours, Photos, Videos, Bible References, Food, and see additional interesting information.



Tour Bethlehem on your computer using WIKITRAVEL, the free travel guide, an internet site.



Tour the Shepherds Field just outside of Bethlehem on your computer using "See the Holy Land" internet site.



Short Video dramatization of Mary & Joseph leaving Nazareth for Bethlehem - by the Nazareth Village organization. (nazarethvillage.com) Click → "Experience Life in the First Century." Click ☰, and choose "Merry Christmas from Nazareth Village 2014"



Water from King David's wells in Bethlehem were used for cooking, hydration, hygiene, and watering animals kept by home.



Tools of a Carpenter in First Century Palestine are described here.

(Continue to next page: **Multi-Dimensions**)



Sheep – in verses of the Old and New Testaments. Choose any version of the Bible you prefer to read—over 180 choices.



King James Version (KJV) about Rachel and Jacob with options for audio reading of text. (Genesis 28 to 35)



New American Bible – Revised Edition (NABRE) text with options for notes and commentary. Atonement for sins by animal sacrifices. (Leviticus chapters 16 & 17)



New International Version (NIV) text with options for foot-notes and cross references. God's Covenant of Circumcision. (Genesis chapter 17)



Matthias - Wikipedia. Multiple viewpoints presented regarding Matthias (with works of art).



Sacrifices at the Temple in Jerusalem - Wikipedia. Multiple viewpoints presented regarding Korban (sacrificial lambs and other animals).



Rachel, wife of Jacob - Wikipedia. Multiple viewpoints presented regarding Rachel.



King David of Israel - Wikipedia. Multiple viewpoints presented regarding David - with beautiful art included.

Figure # - Photo and Art Credits Thankful & grateful for courtesy of:

Fig. 1. Bethlehem in the hills of Judea rises in the background of the flock of sheep and shepherd:
Acts242
dodsonlumber.com

Fig. 2. Map of roads and trade routes (---) around Bethlehem and Jerusalem:
Bible History Online
bible-history.com

Fig 3. Jerusalem Marketplace:
Living Bulwark
swordofthespirit.net/bulwark/april2015p5.htm

Fig. 4. Unblemished Lamb: Paul the Poke's Blog
paulthepoke.files.wordpress.com

Fig. 5. A "Tower of the Flock":
He That Has An Ear
hethathasanear.com

Fig. 6. A mother and 3 children in stable/cave:
windmills-ofyourmind.blogspot.com,
Matson Collection, Library of Congress
photographium.com

Fig. 7. Rachel's Tomb, Bethlehem area. Drawing perhaps done around 1900. Originally, Jacob placed only a stone pillar as a marker around 1500 B.C. Over the centuries, buildings were constructed to protect and honor this site:
Jerusalem, Bethany, and Bethlehem by J. L. Porter
www.lifeintheholylnd.com

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