

CHRISTMAS 2017

calvary
chapel
portsmouth

Does It Really Matter?

The Importance of the details!

CHRIST



Does it really matter?

- Last Sunday we saw how just one verse in the NT validates & put's God's seal on the Feast of Chanukah
 - It is actually more of an editorial comment!
- Paul hangs the fact that the blessings of Abraham can now fall also upon the Church on the difference between singular and plural
 - His entire argument is built on the grammatical structure of the text!

Does it really matter?

- Consider every other area of life:
- Do the details matter?
- *What is your tolerance for being off course? Are you ok with a one degree mistake? At first glance, it may seem like “no big deal,” but once you start to see the full possible impact of such an error, you’ll probably agree with me that even a one degree mistake is unacceptable.*
- *For every degree you fly off course, you will miss your target by 92 feet for every mile that you fly.*
- *For every 60 miles you fly, you will miss your target by one mile.*
- *Flying around the equator will land you almost 500 miles off target.*

Does it really matter?

- Consider every other area of life:
- Forensic investigation?
 - An error in analysis could lead to the wrong person being imprisoned!
- Doctor/Consultant?
 - A wrong diagnosis could be life threatening!
- Surgeon?
- Helicopter pilot?
- Musician?
 - One string out of tune affects the whole

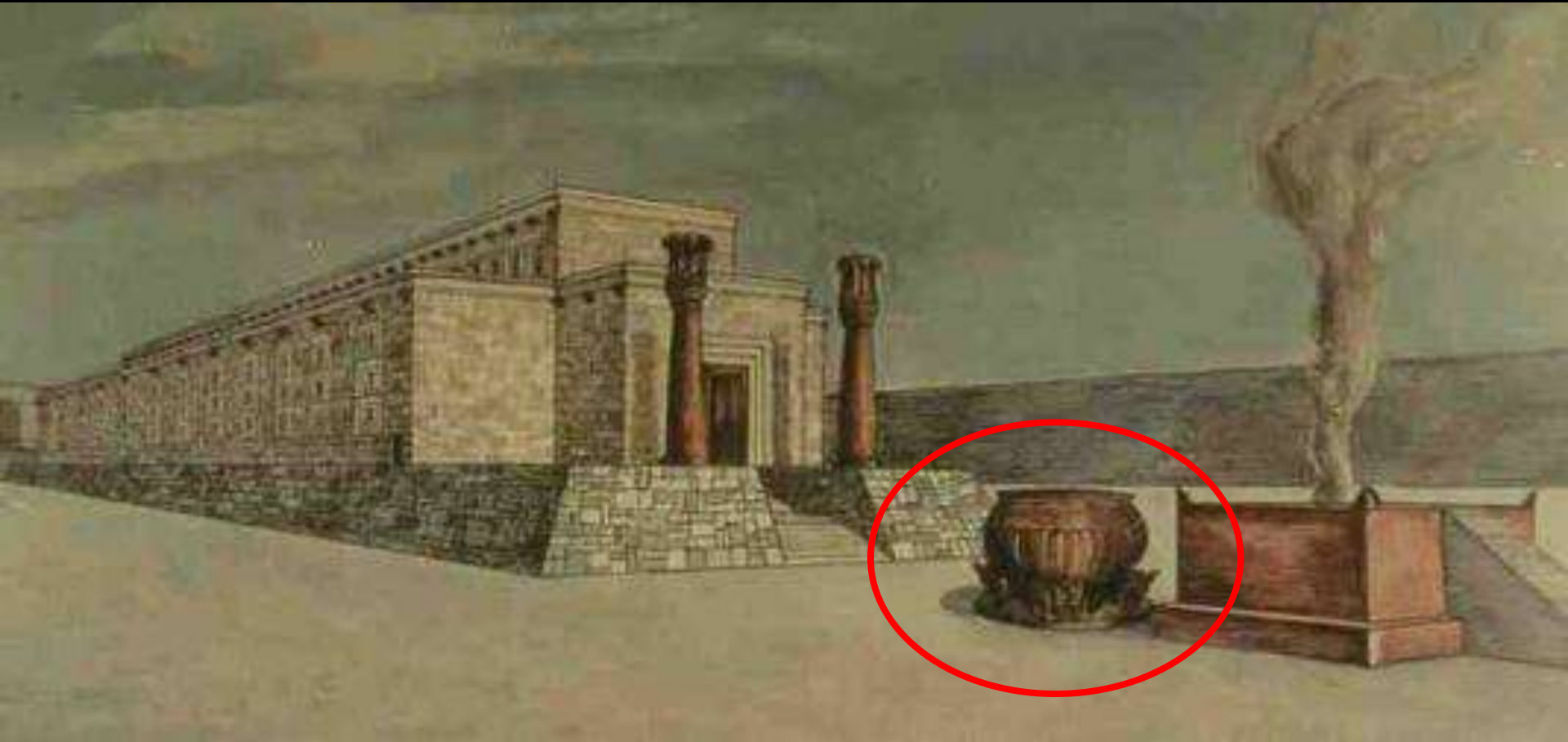
Does it really matter?

- In Jesus' own words:

¹⁸ For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.

Matthew 5:18

The Molten Sea

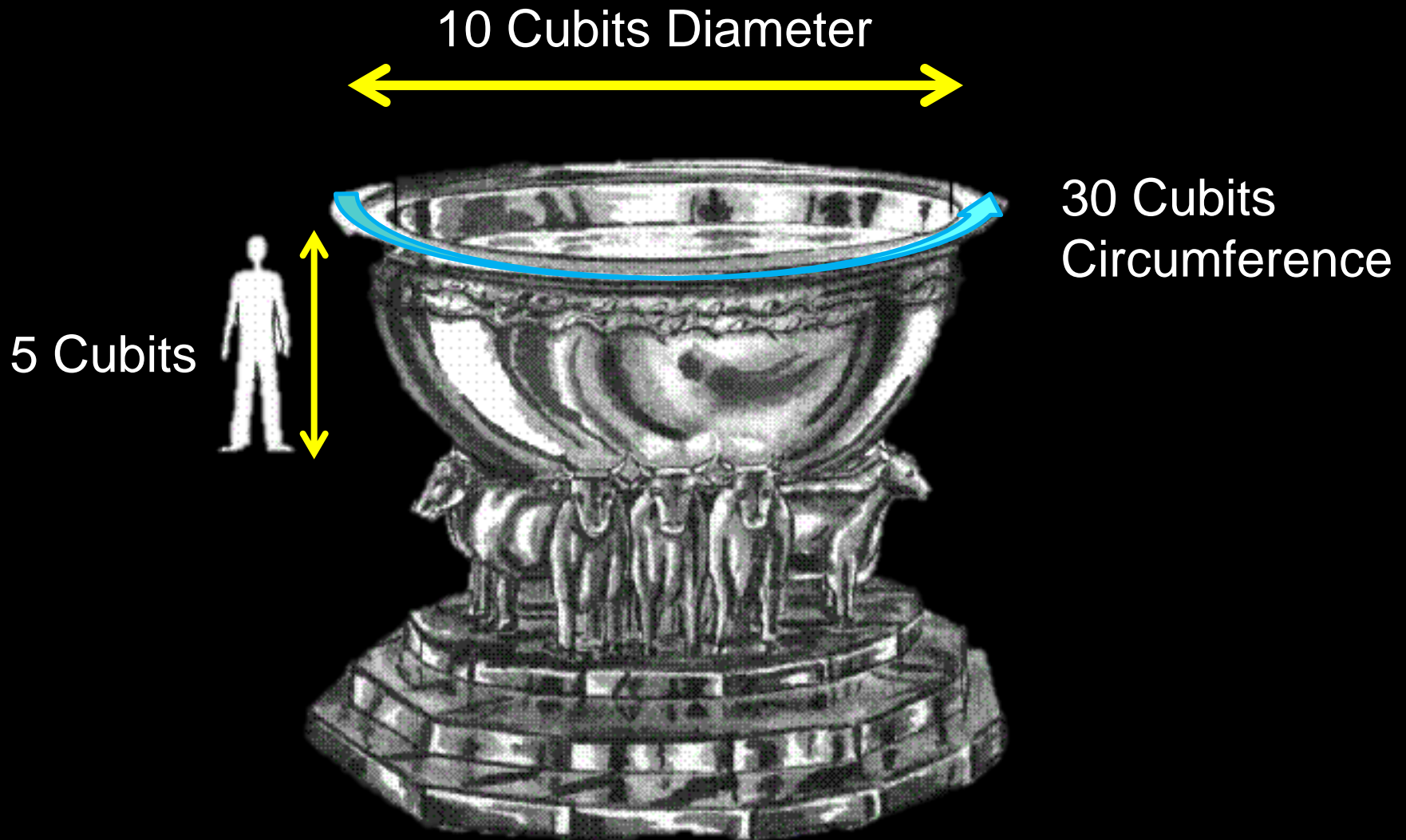


An Error in the Bible!

²³ And he made a molten sea, ten cubits from the one brim to the other: it was round all about, and his height was five cubits: and a line of thirty cubits did compass it round about.

1 Kings 7:23

The 'Molten Sea'



A Mathematical Error?

- Critics will use examples like this if we are not prepared
 - Muslim scholar Shabbir (in his debate on 25th February 1998 against Jay Smith in Birmingham, UK) quoted this “contradiction” and added to it saying that if the bath had a diameter of 10 cubits it cannot possibly have had a circumference of 30 cubits as the text says (since ‘pi’ dictates that it would have a circumference of 31.416 or a 9.549 diameter).
 - Shabbir made the humorous comment “Find me a bath like that and I will get baptized in it!”

A Mathematical Error?

- We are told here that the circumference is 3x the diameter (3 x 10 = 30 Cubits?)
- This is mathematically incorrect!

Circumference = π x diameter

$\pi = 3.14159265358979$

A Mathematical Error?

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עגל סביב וחמש באמה קומתו (וקוה)
שלשים באמה יסב אתו סביב:
[וקו]

A Mathematical Error?

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[וקו] ←
qere *kethiv*

Hebrew Alphanumerics

a	1	y	10	q	100
b	2	k	20	r	200
g	3	l	30	f	300
d	4	m	40	t	400
h	5	n	50	J	500
w	6	s	60		
z	7	[70		
h	8	P	80		
F	9	x	90		

A Spelling Lesson

hwq *kethiv* (written variation) 111

wq *qere* (marginal annotation) 106

q = 100

w = 6

h = 5

$3 \times 111/106 =$

3.141509433962 cubits

***...in a circumference of over 46 feet,
an error of less than 15 thousandths
of an inch!***

Artistic Licence?

- Matthew 2:7-11

Modern Translation

⁷Then Herod called for a private meeting with the wise men, and he learned from them the time when the star first appeared. ⁸Then he told them, "Go to Bethlehem and search carefully for the child. And when you find him, come back and tell me so that I can go and worship him, too!"

⁹After this interview the wise men went their way. And the star they had seen in the east guided them to Bethlehem.

It went ahead of them and stopped over the place where the child was. ¹⁰When they saw the star, they were filled with joy! ¹¹They entered the house and saw the child with his mother, Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him.

KJV

9 When they had heard the king, they departed; and, lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was.

- There is no mention of Bethlehem in verse 9!

Artistic Licence?

- Matthew 2:7-11
- Why is this important?
- Because the Magi never went to Bethlehem!
- Following the birth of Jesus...
 - ...after 8 days He was circumcised (Luke 2:21)
 - ...after 41 days Mary & Joseph took Jesus to the temple to present Him to the Lord according to the Law (there they met Simeon & Anna) (Luke 2:22-39)
- They then returned home to Nazareth!

And when they had performed all things according to the law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own city Nazareth. (Luke 2:39)

Traditional Errors



Does it really matter?

- In Jesus' own words:

15 Thus have ye made the commandment of God of none effect by your tradition.

Matthew 15:6

8 For laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold the tradition of men

Mark 7:8

Two Questions:

- Why Bethlehem?
- Why Shepherds?

Hidden Agenda!

- Satan was determined to stop the 1st Christmas!
- Having failed in that attempt he has been unrelenting in trying to obscure it ever since!
- C H Spurgeon stated:
- *“Discernment is not telling right from wrong*
- *... it is telling right from almost right!”*

Bethlehem's Shepherds

- Alfred Edersheim, was a nineteenth-century Jewish scholar and convert to Christianity
- Edersheim highlighted that the flocks kept around Bethlehem were destined for temple sacrifice - something obfuscated by tradition
- The shepherds keeping watch over these sheep knew very well the intended purpose of the lambs under their care.
- Their job was to guard their sheep from becoming injured or blemished.

Bethlehem's Shepherds

- So it was to those watching over animals destined for temple sacrifice that the angels announced Jesus' birth.
- The arrival of the ultimate Lamb of God was revealed to those responsible for watching over the sacrificial lambs that had always pointed toward Him.
- Bethlehem was chosen as the place of Christ's birth for precisely this reason!

Bethlehem's Shepherds

- In the Jewish Mishnah: (Shekelim Ch7: Section 4)
- *“The lambs that were raised in this particular place were particularly special in that they were from a unique flock that was made up of sheep that were designated to be sacrificed in Jerusalem, and in particular, the sacrificial lambs for the Passover sacrifices”*
- The men who kept them were specifically trained for this task, & were educated in what an animal to be sacrificed had to be like.

Bethlehem's Shepherds

- Their job was to make sure that none of the animals were hurt, or damaged because they had to be 'without blemish' according to the Torah
- And for that reason these lambs when they were born were wrapped in "swaddling bands" to protect them from injury,
- So, being themselves under rabbinical care, these shepherds would maintain a ceremonially clean 'stable' for a birthing place

Bethlehem's Shepherds

- According to the Talmud, all sheep found in the area “from Jerusalem as far as Migdal Eder” [Bethlehem] & on both sides were deemed to be holy and consecrated
- They could *only* be used for sacrifices in the temple...
- ...in particular for the Peace offerings and Passover sacrifices.

Bethlehem's Shepherds

- *“Luke's original audience would have immediately picked up on the religious significance of the Bethlehem shepherds watching their flocks by night”*
- *“Aware of the Tanakh (Old Testament) and the Jewish Temple worship of the day, they would have known that when you said Bethlehem, you said "sacrificial lambs". The hills around Bethlehem were home to the thousands of lambs used in ritual worship in the Temple”. - Harold Smith*

Bethlehem's Shepherds

- *“As a boy from Bethlehem, King David would likely have tended sheep destined for the daily offerings or used in the sacrifices on the high holidays in these very hills”.*
- *“Every day, according to the Torah, two lambs were required for a daily sacrifice in the Temple, meaning that 730 were needed each year plus the tens of thousands more lambs needed for Pesach (Passover) as well as for the other religious rituals”. - Harold Smith*

Bethlehem's Shepherds

- *Everyone in Israel recognised Bethlehem as being synonymous with sacrificial lambs.*
– Harold Smith

¹⁹ But Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart.

Luke 2:19

Bethlehem's Shepherds

- For 1st Century Christians:
- *Hearing that Yeshua was born in Bethlehem would have automatically triggered an image of the Lamb of YHVH who takes away the sin [of the World].*
- *With that in mind, it's easy for us to imagine one of Luke's listeners saying, 'Of course the Lamb of YHVH would originate in Bethlehem - all the lambs for sacrifice came from there.'*

– Harold Smith

Micah's Prophecy

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.

Micah 5:2

- Do you know what *else* Micah prophesied?

O Holy Night

- All the places to reside in Bethlehem were full
- Jesus was therefore ‘born in a manger’
 - Tradition has told us that the Inn Keeper directed them to his/a stable
- The Shepherd’s were in the fields around Bethlehem
- The angels appeared to announce Jesus’ birth (the Messiah!)
- The angles gave the Shepherd’s a sign
 - But no directions!

The Sign!

12 And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.

Luke 2:1-18

The Sign!

¹² And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find **A babe** wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in **THE manger.**

Luke 2:1-18

- The Greek text indicates they were to find **A babe** lying in **THE manger**
- Thus a babe lying in the manger itself would be that which would confirm the words of the angel
 - **There was something significant about this manger**

A Reason To Celebrate

- The Shepherds were fearful & afraid
– and no doubt a little bemused!

²⁰ And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them.

Luke 2:20

- Why would just seeing a baby in a stable next to an Inn cause such overwhelming joy?
- Because they didn't go to a stable next to an Inn!
- There may not have even been an Inn!

No Room at the Inn?

- The word translated 'inn' is properly 'guest-chamber'
 - It is more likely this was an annex built onto the family home
 - The reason there was 'no room' was may have been more to do with the laws of ceremonial purity than Bethlehem being 'fully booked'
 - Lev 12 / 15:19-30
- Tradition has invented 'Hotel Bethlehem' and an Inn Keeper, who was benevolent enough to allow Mary and Joseph to take shelter in his stable alongside oxen and cattle!

A Reason To Celebrate

- So where did they stay?
- ...and what made the Shepherds so ecstatic?

²⁰ And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them.

Luke 2:20

Micah's Other Prophecy

⁸ And thou, O tower of the flock, the strong hold of the daughter of Zion, unto thee shall it come, even the first dominion; the kingdom shall come to the daughter of Jerusalem.

Micah 4:8

The Tower of the Flock

- The Hebrew phrase tower of the flock here, is "migdal edar" [mig-dawl ay-der]
- It refers to a particular tower that was built in ancient times to watch over the valley on the edge of Bethlehem, to protect the city,
- The name means "watch tower of the flock"
- Several of these towers are recorded in scripture
 - We find them in Judges 8:71, 9:46, & 9:51; and in 2 Kings 9:17, 18:8; and in Nehemiah 3:1

The Tower of the Flock

- Rabbi Short states:
- *“This Migdal Eder was not the watchtower for the ordinary flocks that pastured on the barren sheep ground beyond Bethlehem... but it lay close to the town on the road to Jerusalem”*. **Book 2 chapter 6**
- Migdal Eder, is also mentioned in the Jewish Targums and is translated *“The anointed one of the flock of Israel”*

The Tower of the Flock

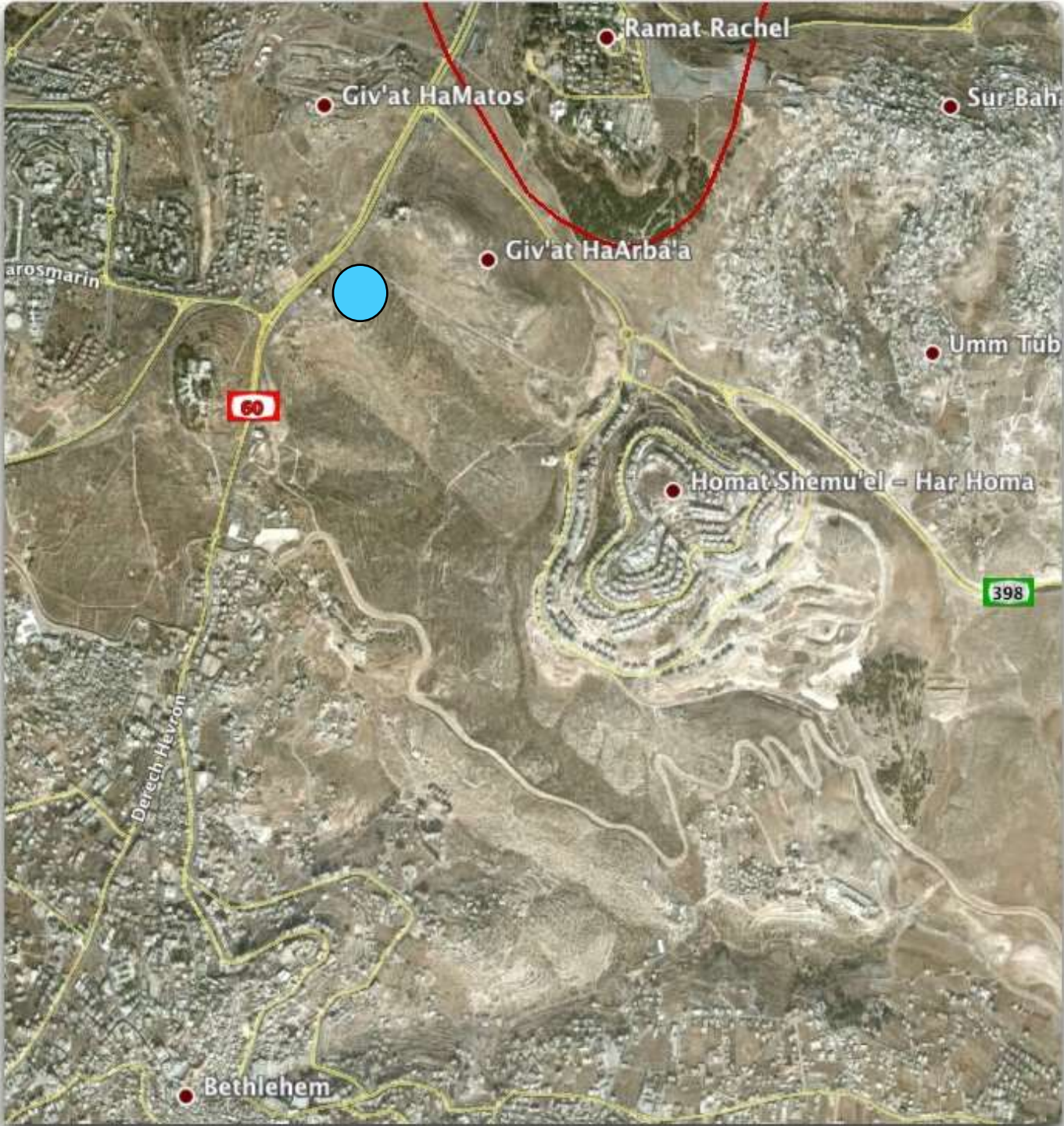
¹⁹ And Rachel died, and was buried in the way to Ephrath, which is Bethlehem.

²⁰ And Jacob set a pillar upon her grave: that is the pillar of Rachel's grave unto this day.

²¹ And Israel journeyed, and spread his tent beyond the tower of Edar.

Genesis 35:19-21





The Tower of the Flock

- It was built as a watch tower...
- ...to be used by shepherds for protection from robbers and wild animals
- Given the significance of the sheep around Bethlehem (destined for Temple sacrifice), it was an important look-out to guard against trouble
- But it served a dual purpose...

The Tower of the Flock

- During lambing season the sheep were brought to the tower from the fields, as the lower level functioned as the birthing room for sacrificial lambs.
- Being themselves under special rabbinical care, these shepherds would strictly maintain a ceremonially clean birthing place.

The Tower of the Flock

- Once birthed, the shepherds would routinely place the lambs in the hewn depression of a limestone rock known as "the manger"
- They would "wrap the new-born lambs in swaddling clothes," preventing them from thrashing about and harming themselves "until they had calmed down" so they could be inspected for the quality of being "without spot or blemish"
 - *Jewish oral tradition & Alfred Edersheim, the Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah.*

The Tower of the Flock

- Approaching this subject from the Hebrew perspective will show, that while swaddling "cloths" were used in the handling of newborn babies, swaddling "bands" (as referenced in Job 38:9) were used for subduing animals prior to sacrifice. These "swaddling bands" were strips of gauze-like cloth used to restrain a lamb being prepared for inspection before sacrifice to prevent thrashing that they not "blemish" themselves.

The Tower of the Flock

- A sacrifice had to be "bound" (Hebrew `aqad) in order to be valid. "Binding" an animal for sacrifice is the Hebrew akeida (ibid, Hebrew Glossary and Terminology); specifically mentioned in Abraham's "binding" of Yitzchak (Isaac) for sacrifice to the Almighty in Genesis 22:9
 - *Jewish oral tradition & Alfred Edersheim, the Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah.*

The Tower of the Flock

- So there was no need for the angels to give these shepherds directions to the birth place, because they already knew it!
- These were the men who raised sacrificial lambs that were sacrificed in the Temple, that were birthed, laid in a manger & wrapped in swaddling bands at Migdal Edar
- When the angelic announcement came, they knew exactly where to go!

The Tower of the Flock

- They would also no doubt be aware of the prophecy from Micah that the Messiah would make His appearance to Israel at their tower!

The Tower of the Flock

- ...as Luke 2 indicates, the sign of the manger could only mean the manger at the base of the Tower of the Flock, as it is found in the original Greek wording of **Luke 2:7,12 and 16!**
- You cannot explain the meaning or direction of the sign they were given or their response unless you have the right manger, the right shepherds and the proper Hebraic perspective.

The Tower of the Flock

- When there was no room for them in the 'guest chamber' ...
- ...Joseph had to find shelter and a place for Mary to give birth
- On their route into Bethlehem they would travel right passed this Tower of the Flock
- And it was to this place that Joseph takes Mary
- And it was in this special place at Migdal Edar that Christ was born, fulfilling the prophecy of Micah

The Tower of the Flock

- Prophetically, Migdal Edar - (the tower of the flock), is the exact place in Bethlehem for the Christ to be born,
- God was faithful in assuring Israel that he would fulfill his promises to them of the kingdom

The Tower of the Flock

- Prominent Jewish writers concluded in the Midrash,
 - (an early Jewish commentary on the O.T.)
- That of all the places in Israel, it would be the “Migdal Eder”, The tower of the flock in Bethlehem, where the arrival of the Messiah would be declared first!

Micah's Other Prophecy

⁸ And thou, O tower of the flock, the strong hold of the daughter of Zion, unto thee shall it come, even the first dominion; the kingdom shall come to the daughter of Jerusalem.

Micah 4:8

Micah's Other Prophecy

- Warren Wiersbe, comments:
- *“As the pregnant woman must deliver the child, So Judah must be taken captive to Babylon. It would be a time of pain but it would eventually bring blessing. God promised to deliver them and restore them, and Micah uses the prophecy of the Babylonian captivity of Judah as a pledge to guarantee the birth of Christ at “Migdal Edar” at Bethlehem, which is exactly where it took place!”*

Micah's Other Prophecy

- Warren Wiersbe, comments:
- *“Micah prophesied that as surely as the Babylonians would soon carry away Judah in the north, so the messiah would come and establish his kingdom, & here Micah pledges that as surely as Babylon would carry away Israel, into captivity, so the messiah would arrive at the tower of the flock. And of course Micah goes on with the prophesy in Ch. 5”*

The Tower of the Flock

- *Migdal Eder, the Tower of the Flock, was the place where lambs destined for the Temple were born and raised. Every firstborn male lamb from the area around Bethlehem was considered holy, set aside for sacrifice in Jerusalem. Generations of hereditary shepherds tended the sacred flocks.*

– Why A Manger? - Bodie and Brock Thoene

Christmas Present

- The Greatest present ever given!
- God's Son, given as the Lamb who would take away the sins of the world.
- Born in the town of the sacrificial lambs
- Inspected by the very shepherds who would approve the lambs to be offered in Jerusalem to atone for sin!
- Laid in *the* manger, and wrapped in swaddling bands to prevent any blemish
- He is the Lamb of God, slain from the foundation of the world!



www.calvaryportsmouth.co.uk