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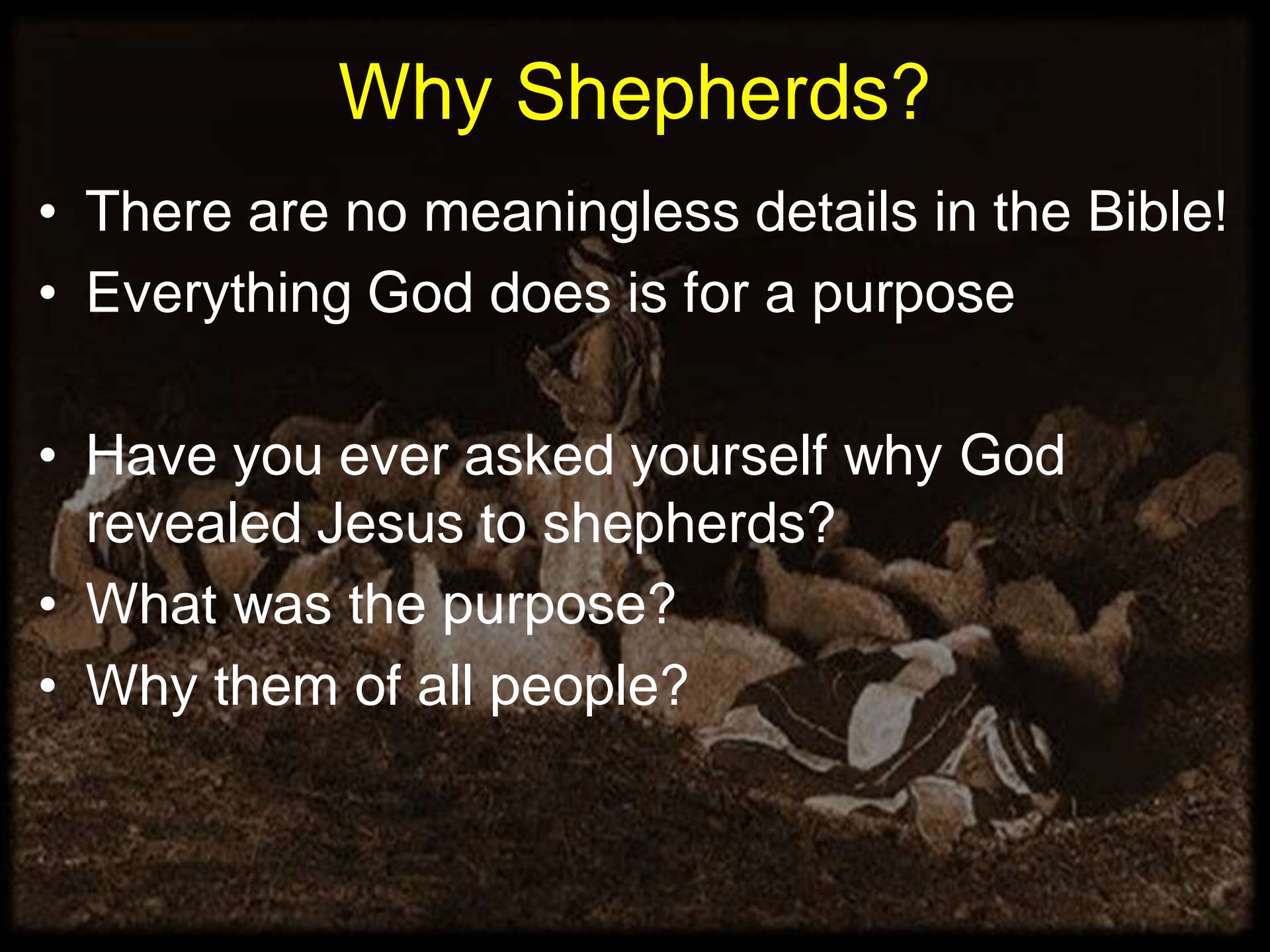
Why Shepherds?

Calvary Portsmouth 2020
Christmas Studies

www.calvaryportsmouth.co.uk

Why Shepherds?

- There are no meaningless details in the Bible!
- Everything God does is for a purpose
- Have you ever asked yourself why God revealed Jesus to shepherds?
- What was the purpose?
- Why them of all people?



Why Shepherds?

- At that time in Israel shepherds were considered the outcasts of society
- It is suggested that this is why the Angels appeared to them:
- *“God has chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty” 1 Cor 1:27*

Why Shepherds?

- The Mishnah advised against a number of professions, including that of shepherd.
 - *A man should not teach his son to be an ass-driver or a camel driver, or a barber or a sailor, or a herdsman or a shopkeeper, for their craft is the craft of robbers* (M. Kidd. 4.14).
- But the Bible described the God of Israel as a Shepherd - **Psalm 23**
- Some of Israel's greatest national heroes—including Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, and David—were shepherds.

Why Shepherds?

- God promised that He will someday shepherd Israel - **Isa. 40:11; Ezek. 34:11–15**
- The work of Israel's future Messiah as that of a shepherd - **Micah. 5:2–4**
- Jesus described Himself as the “good Shepherd” who “lays down His life for the sheep” - **John 10:11**
- So despite ‘public opinion’ God’s view of shepherds is clearly not the same as man’s!

Why Shepherds?

- But why *did* God choose shepherds?
- It wasn't a PR exercise!
- Although they 'made known abroad' what they had seen...
- ...the excitement quickly petered out
- The news certainly didn't make it as far as Jerusalem because it wouldn't be for another 2 years that Herod would hear about this 'new-born king'



¹ 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 Cyrenius was governor of Syria.)

³ And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city.

Luke 2:1-3



⁴ 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:)

⁵ To be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child.

⁶ And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered.

Luke 2:4-6



7 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.

Luke 2:7



8 And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night.

9 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.

Luke 2:8-9



10 And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.

11 For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.

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

Luke 2:10-12



13 And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying,

14 Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.

15 And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us.

Luke 2:13-15



16 And they came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger.

17 And when they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child.

18 And all they that heard it wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds.

Luke 2:16-18



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

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 2:19-20



Who were the Shepherds?

- So who were the shepherds in Luke 2?
- ...and why did God choose to send His angels to them?
- What significance did they have?
- ...and what does the Bible really say?
- Remember: Tradition makes the Word of no effect! - **Mark 7:13**

Traditional Errors

- The birth of Christ actually took place in late September (29th?) and not on the 25th December
- 25th December was a pagan celebration called 'Saturnalia'
- Christians adopted this date as it was already a 'feast' to celebrate the 'mother & child', new birth etc.
 - All of which was directly related to the religion of ancient Babylon

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'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,
- The swaddling bands were actually made from worn-out priestly robes

Bethlehem's Shepherds

- So, being themselves under rabbinical care, these shepherds would maintain a ceremonially clean environment 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] 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 2:12

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’ (and no mention of a stable!)

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 & Inn Keeper!

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
- But why wouldn't the family welcome them in?
 - Firstly, there genuinely might not have been enough room with the rest of the family there
 - most of whom would probably live closer than Nazareth
 - Secondly it may have been more to do with the laws of ceremonial purity *Lev 12 / 15:19-30*
 - Giving birth in the house would have defiled the house
 - Thirdly, the family would have wanted to avoid the scandal of welcoming Joseph and his pregnant girlfriend!

No Room at the Inn?

- 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!
 - The 'account' of this fills Christmas Carols and Christmas cards!
- But the supposed Inn Keeper is never mentioned
- Nor is a Stable!

Where did they stay?

⁶ And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered.

⁷ 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.

Luke 2:6-7

- So because there was no room in the 'inn' Luke tells us she gave birth, wrapped Jesus in swaddling cloths and laid Him in a manger
 - That is the only 'clues' we are given to the location!

A Reason To Celebrate

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

- ...what made the Shepherds so ecstatic?
- ...and why go and tell everyone? (v17)
- These shepherds connected the dots!
 - It was what they were *told*
 - It was what they *saw*
 - It was *where* they saw it

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

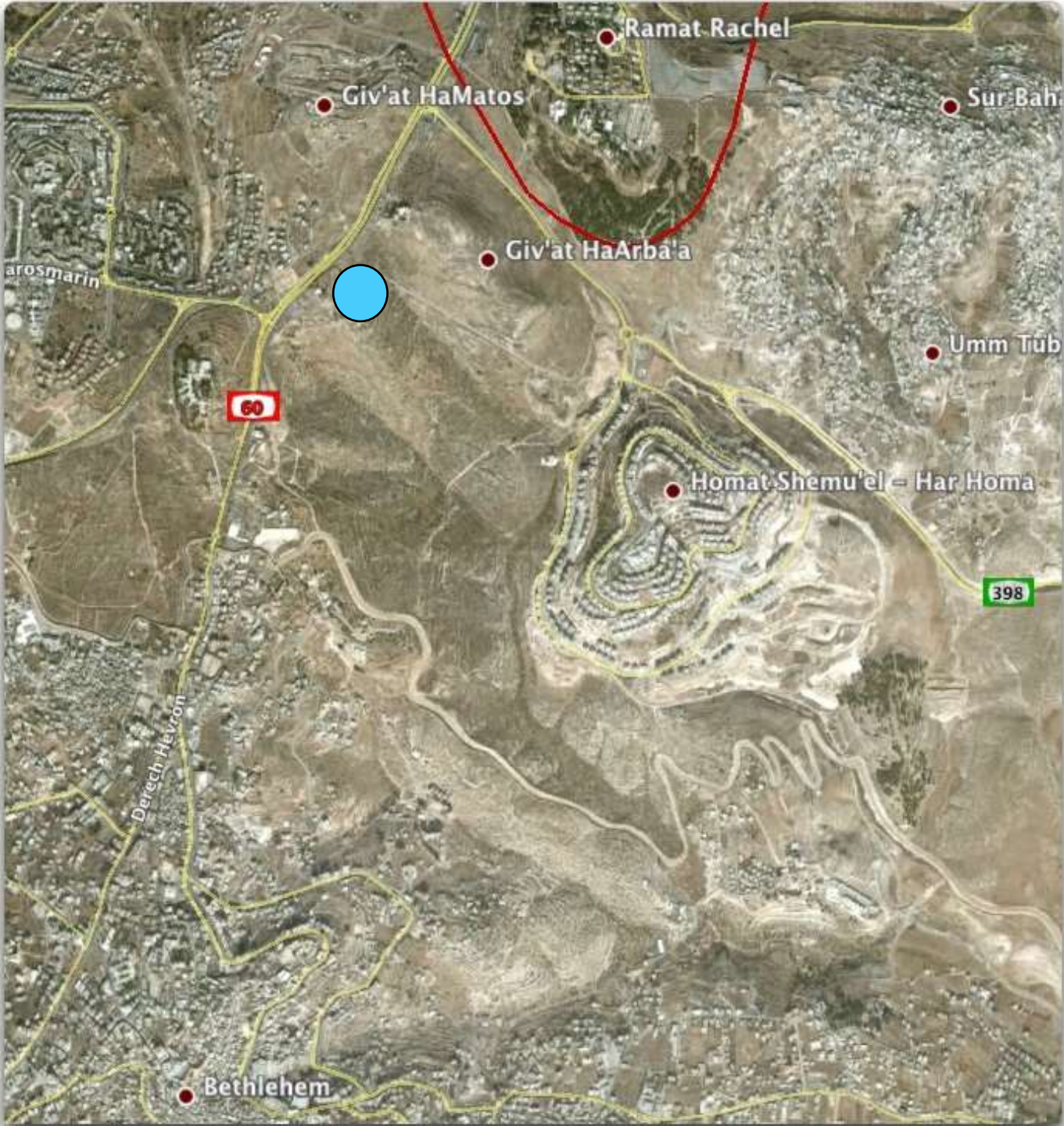
¹⁹ And Rachel died, and was buried in the way to Ephrath, which is Bethlehem.

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





Ramat Rachel

Giv'at HaMatos

Sur Bah

arosmarin

Giv'at HaArba'a

Umm Tub

60

Homat Shemu'el - Har Homa

398

Derech Hevron

Bethlehem

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

- 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 Eder” 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

So why Shepherds?

- These shepherd's role was to inspect the lambs to be used as sacrificial offerings
- They were chosen to inspect and confirm that the baby lying in their manger was indeed without blemish
- This was the purpose of Christ's first coming...
- "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" – [John 1:29](#)

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!



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