

~BETHLEHEM 1 (519)

(Beth'le-hem) [House of Bread]

- A town in the Judean highlands overlooking the principal highway leading from Jerusalem down to Beer-sheba. It is today called **Beit Lahm**, **Bet Lehem**, located about 9 kilometers (5.5 miles) South-Southwest of the Temple Mount. Its altitude of some 777 meters (2,550 feet) above sea level is about the same elevation as Jerusalem itself. The countryside, though rocky, produces olives, grapes, and various cereals.
- Thus Naomi made her return, Ruth the Moabite woman, her daughter-in-law, being with her when returning from the fields of Moab, and they came to **Bethlehem** at the commencement of barley harvest. (**Ruth 1:22**)
- The earlier name of **Bethlehem** evidently was **Ephrath**, or, **Ephrathah**. Jacob buried Rachel on the way to **Ephrath**, that is to say, **Bethlehem**.
- Thus Rachel died and was buried on the way to **Ephrath**, that is to say, **Bethlehem**. (**Genesis 35:19**)
- And as for me, when I was coming from Paddan, Rachel died alongside me in the land of Canaan on the way while there was yet a good stretch of land before coming to **Ephrath**, so that I buried her there on the way to **Ephrath**, that is to say; **Bethlehem**. (**Genesis 48:7**)
- Among the early descendants of Jacob's son Judah are mentioned Salma the father of **Bethlehem**.
- Salma the father of **Bethlehem**, Hareph the father of Beth-gader. (**1 Chronicles 2:51**)
- The sons of Salma were **Bethlehem** and the Netophathites, Atroth-beth-joab and half of the Manahathites, the Zorites. (**1 Chronicles 2:54**)
- And Hur the firstborn of Ephrathah the father of **Bethlehem**.
- And Penuel the father of Gedor and Ezer the father of Hushah.

These were the sons of Hur the firstborn of Ephrathah the father of **Bethlehem**. (1 Chronicles 4:4)

- This expression may point to these men as forefathers of the Israelites who later occupied **Bethlehem**. When the Israelites entered Canaan, **Bethlehem** fell within the territory of Judah, though it is not specifically mentioned in any list of Judean cities nor is there anything to indicate its size or prominence at that time. Since there was another **Bethlehem** in the territory of Zebulun.
- Next the third lot came up for the sons of Zebulun by their families, and the boundary of their inheritance came to be as far as Sarid. (Joshua 19:10)
- And Kattath and Nahalal and Shimron and Idalah and **Bethlehem**, twelve cities and their settlements. (Joshua 19:15)
- The town in Judah was usually distinguished by reference to Ephrath, or by calling it **Bethlehem in Judah**.
- Now there happened to be a young man of **Bethlehem** in Judah of the family of Judah, and he was a Levite. And he was residing there for a time. (Judges 17:7)
- And the man proceeded to go from the city of **Bethlehem in Judah** to reside for a time wherever he might find a place. At length while going his way he came into the mountainous region of Ephraim as far as the house of Micah. (Judges 17:8)
- Then Micah said to him; Where do you come from? At that he said to him; I am a Levite from **Bethlehem in Judah**, and I am on my way to reside for a time wherever I may find a place. (Judges 17:9)
- Now it happened in those days that there was no king in Israel. And it came about that a certain Levite was residing for a time in the remotest parts of the mountainous region of Ephraim. In time he took as his wife a concubine from **Bethlehem in Judah**. (Judges 19:1)
- And his concubine began to commit fornication against him. Finally she went away from him to the house of her father at **Bethlehem in Judah** and continued there fully four months. (Judges 19:2)

- In turn he said to him; We are passing along from **Bethlehem in Judah** to the remotest parts of the mountainous region of Ephraim. That is where I am from, but I went to **Bethlehem in Judah**, and it is to my own house that I am going, and there is nobody taking me on into the house. (**Judges 19:18**)

See Also EPHRATHAH 2

- Thus Judge Ibzan may have been from **Bethlehem in Judah**, but the absence of any reference to **Judah**, or **Ephrath**, causes many to view him as from **Bethlehem** in Zebulun.
- And Ibzan from **Bethlehem** began to judge Israel after him. (**Judges 12:8**)
- And he came to have thirty sons and thirty daughters. He sent outside and brought in thirty daughters for his sons from outside. And he continued to judge Israel for seven years. (**Judges 12:9**)
- Then Ibzan died and was buried in **Bethlehem**. (**Judges 12:10**)
- Elimelech, his wife Naomi, and their sons were from **Bethlehem**, and here Naomi returned with Ruth the Moabitess.
- Now it came about in the days when the judges administered justice that a famine arose in the land, and a man proceeded to go from **Bethlehem in Judah** to reside as an alien in the fields of Moab, he with his wife and his two sons. (**Ruth 1:1**)
- And the man's name was Elimelech, and his wife's name Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Chilion, Ephrathites from **Bethlehem in Judah**. Eventually they came to the fields of Moab and continued there. (**Ruth 1:2**)
- And they both continued on their way until they came to **Bethlehem**. And it came about that as soon as they came to **Bethlehem**, all the city became stirred up over them, and the women kept saying; Is this Naomi? (**Ruth 1:19**)
- Thus Naomi made her return, Ruth the Moabite woman, her daughter-in-law, being with her when returning from the fields of Moab, and they came to **Bethlehem** at the commencement of barley harvest. (**Ruth 1:22**)

- Boaz was also of **Bethlehem**, and the remaining events of the book of Ruth involving ancestors of Jesus.
- Salmon became father to Boaz by Rahab. Boaz became father to Obed by Ruth. Obed became father to Jesse. (**Matthew 1:5**)
- Jesse became father to David the king. David became father to Solomon by the wife of Uriah. (**Matthew 1:6**)
- Center around this town and its fields.
- And, look! Boaz came from **Bethlehem** and proceeded to say to the harvesters; Yehowah be with you. In turn they would say to him: Yehowah bless you. (**Ruth 2:4**)
- At this all the people that were in the gate and the older men said, Witnesses! May Yehowah grant the wife who is coming into your house to be like Rachel and like Leah, both of whom built the house of Israel, and you prove your worth in Ephrathah and make a notable name in **Bethlehem**. (**Ruth 4:11**)
- David the son of Jesse the **Bethlehemite** was born in **Bethlehem** of Judah, tended his father's sheep in that area, and was later anointed there by Samuel to be Israel's future king.
- Eventually Yehowah said to Samuel; For how long will you be mourning for Saul, while I, on the other hand, have rejected him from ruling as king over Israel? Fill your horn with oil and go. I shall send you to Jesse the **Bethlehemite**, because I have provided among his sons a king for myself. (**1 Samuel 16:1**)
- And Samuel proceeded to do what Yehowah spoke. When he came to **Bethlehem** the older men of the city began to tremble at meeting him, and so they said; Does your coming mean peace? (**1 Samuel 16:4**)
- Accordingly Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the midst of his brothers. And the spirit of Yehowah began to be operative upon David from that day forward. Later Samuel rose and went his way to Ramah. (**1 Samuel 16:13**)
- And one of the attendants proceeded to answer and say; Look! I have seen how a son of Jesse the **Bethlehemite** is skilled at

playing, and he is a valiant, mighty man and a man of war and an intelligent speaker and a well-formed man, and Yehowah is with him. (**1 Samuel 16:18**)

- Now David was the son of this Ephrathite from **Bethlehem** of Judah whose name was Jesse. And he had eight sons. And in the days of Saul the man was already old among men. (**1 Samuel 17:12**)
- And David was going and returning from Saul to tend the sheep of his father at **Bethlehem**. (**1 Samuel 17:15**)
- Saul now said to him; Whose son are you, boy? To which David said; The son of your servant Jesse the **Bethlehemite**. (**1 Samuel 17:58**)
- If your father should miss me at all, then you must say; David earnestly asked leave of absence of me to run to **Bethlehem** his city, because there is a yearly sacrifice there for all the family. (**1 Samuel 20:6**)
- Later, as a fugitive, David longed for a drink of water from a cistern at **Bethlehem**, then the site of a Philistine outpost.
- And David was then in the place hard to approach, and an outpost of the Philistines was then in **Bethlehem**. (**2 Samuel 23:14**)
- After a while David expressed his craving and said; O that I might have a drink of the water from the cistern of **Bethlehem** that is at the gate! (**2 Samuel 23:15**)
- And David was then in the place hard to approach, and a garrison of the Philistines was then in **Bethlehem**. (**1 Chronicles 11:16**)
- After a while David showed his craving and said; O that I might have a drink of the water from the cistern of **Bethlehem**, which is at the gate! (**1 Chronicles 11:17**)
- It may be noted that three wells are still found on the North side of the town. Elhanan, one of David's outstanding warriors, was the son of a man of **Bethlehem**.
- Asahel the brother of Joab was among the thirty, Elhanan the son

of Dodo of **Bethlehem**. (2 Samuel 23:24)

- As were David's nephews Joab, Abishai, and Asahel. Fleet-footed Asahel was buried there following his being slain by powerful Abner. (2 Samuel 2:18-23,32)
- Despite its being in a central location, on a major highway, and in a good position militarily, since it was at a high altitude and built on a site commanding a limestone ridge, and although it was David's hometown, **Bethlehem** was not chosen to be David's capital.
- It is not until the reign of Solomon's son Rehoboam that **Bethlehem** is directly mentioned again, when it was included among the cities fortified by that king.
- And Rehoboam continued to dwell in Jerusalem and proceeded to build fortified cities in Judah. (2 Chronicles 11:5)
- Thus he rebuilt **Bethlehem** and Etam and Tekoa. (2 Chronicles 11:6)
- Near **Bethlehem** the remnant of the people left in Judah after the fall of Jerusalem to Babylon made a stopover before going on down to Egypt.
- So they went and took up dwelling in the lodging place of Chimham that was beside **Bethlehem**, in order to go on and enter into Egypt. (Jeremiah 41:17)
- Men of **Bethlehem** were among those returning from Babylon following the exile.
- The sons of **Bethlehem**, a hundred and twenty-three. (Ezra 2:21)
- The men of **Bethlehem** and Netophah, a hundred and eighty-eight. (Nehemiah 7:26)
- As noted previously, **Bethlehem** was not listed among the cities of Judah in the accounts of the tribal divisions. Though Bible books mention it in connection with certain individuals, it does not otherwise seem to have been a prominent town nor did it have a large population a village when Jesus was on earth.
- Has not the Scripture said that the Christ is coming from the

offspring of David, and from **Bethlehem** the village where David used to be? (**John 7:42**)

- Hence the prophet Micah in his Messianic prophecy at;
- And you, O **Bethlehem Ephrathah**, the one too little to get to be among the thousands of Judah, from you there will come out to me the one who is to become ruler in Israel, whose origin is from early times, from the days of time indefinite. (**Micah 5:2**)
- Could refer to **Bethlehem Ephrathah** as the one too little to get to be among the thousands of Judah. Yet his prophecy showed that small **Bethlehem** would have the singular honor of being the town from which the Messiah would come. The Jewish people understood this prophecy to mean that the Messiah or Christ would be born in and proceed from that town.
- Therefore some of the crowd that heard these words began saying; This is for a certainty The Prophet. (**John 7:40**)
- Others were saying; This is the Christ. But some were saying, The Christ is not actually coming out of Galilee, is he? (**John 7:41**)
- Has not the Scripture said that the Christ is coming from the offspring of David, and from **Bethlehem** the village where David used to be? (**John 7:42**)
- A belief also expressed by their chief priests and scribes.
- At hearing this King Herod was agitated, and all Jerusalem along with him. (**Matthew 2:3**)
- And on gathering together all the chief priests and scribes of the people he began to inquire of them where the Christ was to be born. (**Matthew 2:4**)
- They said to him; In **Bethlehem** of Judea. For this is how it has been written through the prophet. (**Matthew 2:5**)
- And you, O **Bethlehem** of the land of Judah, are by no means the most insignificant city among the governor's of Judah, for out of you will come forth a governing one, who will shepherd my people, Israel. (**Matthew 2:6**)

- **Thus, though Mary became pregnant in Nazareth of Galilee, she gave birth to Jesus in **Bethlehem** of Judea, in order to fulfill the divine prophecy.**
- **In her sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent forth from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth. (Luke 1:26)**
- **To a virgin promised in marriage to a man named Joseph of David's house, and the name of the virgin was Mary. (Luke 1:27)**
- **And when he went in before her he said, Good day, highly favored one, Yehowah is with you. (Luke 1:28)**
- **But she was deeply disturbed at the saying and began to reason out what sort of greeting this might be. (Luke 1:29)**
- **So the angel said to her; Have no fear, Mary, for you have found favor with God. (Luke 1:30)**
- **And, look! You will conceive in your womb and give birth to a son, and you are to call his name Jesus. (Luke 1:31)**
- **This one will be great and will be called Son of the Most High, and Yehowah God will give him the throne of David his father. (Luke 1:32)**
- **And he will rule as king over the house of Jacob forever, and there will be no end of his kingdom. (Luke 1:33)**
- **But Mary said to the angel; How is this to be, since I am having no intercourse with a man? (Luke 1:34)**
- **In answer the angel said to her; Holy spirit will come upon you, and power of the Most High will overshadow you. For that reason also what is born will be called holy, God's Son. (Luke 1:35)**
- **And, look! Elizabeth your relative has also herself conceived a son, in her old age, and this is the sixth month for her, the so-called barren woman. (Luke 1:36)**
- **Because with God no declaration will be an impossibility. (Luke 1:37)**

- Then Mary said; Look! Yehowah's slave girl! May it take place with me according to your declaration. At that the angel departed from her. (Luke 1:38)
- Of course, Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, to David's city, which is called **Bethlehem**, because of his being a member of the house and family of David. (Luke 2:4)
- To get registered with Mary, who had been given him in marriage as promised, at present heavy with child. (Luke 2:5)
- While they were there, the days came to the full for her to give birth. (Luke 2:6)
- And she gave birth to her son, the firstborn, and she bound him with cloth bands and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the lodging room. (Luke 2:7)
- This meant a trip that, on present roads, covers a distance of about 150 kilometers (93 miles) through hilly country.
- At the time of the birth, shepherds were living outdoors in the fields and keeping watches at night over their flocks.
- There were also in that same country shepherds living out of doors and keeping watches in the night over their flocks. (Luke 2:8)
- While sheep may be led out to pasture during the daytime at any season of the year, the fact that the shepherds were living out in the fields and spending the night there with their flocks provides a definite time indication for the period of Jesus birth. The rainy season for Palestine begins about mid-October, lasting several months.
- By December, **Bethlehem**, like Jerusalem, experiences frequent frost at night. Thus the fact that shepherds of Bethlehem were in the fields at night points to a time prior to the start of the rainy season. It is also most unlikely that Caesar Augustus would unnecessarily provoke the Jews by ordering a registration in the wintry and rainy month of December, when traveling is particularly difficult.
- Now in those days a decree went forth from Caesar Augustus for

- all the inhabited earth to be registered. ([Luke 2:1](#))
- This first registration took place when Quirinius was governor of Syria. ([Luke 2:2](#))
 - And all people went traveling to be registered, each one to his own city. ([Luke 2:3](#))
 - Of course, Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, to David's city, which is called **Bethlehem**, because of his being a member of the house and family of David. ([Luke 2:4](#))
 - To get registered with Mary, who had been given him in marriage as promised, at present heavy with child. ([Luke 2:5](#))
 - While they were there, the days came to the full for her to give birth. ([Luke 2:6](#))
 - Keep praying that your flight may not occur in wintertime, nor on the Sabbath day. ([Matthew 24:20](#))
 - The original location of the stable in **Bethlehem** in which Jesus was born is unknown. Sometime after Jesus birth when his parents were residing, not in a stable, but in a house, **Bethlehem** was visited by some Oriental astrologers searching for the young child.
 - After Jesus had been born in **Bethlehem of Judea** in the days of Herod the king, look! Astrologers from eastern parts came to Jerusalem. ([Matthew 2:1](#))
 - Saying: Where is the one born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when we were in the east, and we have come to do him obeisance. ([Matthew 2:2](#))
 - At hearing this King Herod was agitated, and all Jerusalem along with him. ([Matthew 2:3](#))
 - And on gathering together all the chief priests and scribes of the people he began to inquire of them where the Christ was to be born. ([Matthew 2:4](#))
 - They said to him; In **Bethlehem of Judea**. For this is how it has been written through the prophet. ([Matthew 2:5](#))

- And you, O **Bethlehem of the land of Judah**, are by no means the most insignificant city among the governor's of Judah, for out of you will come forth a governing one, who will shepherd my people, Israel. (**Matthew 2:6**)
- Then Herod secretly summoned the astrologers and carefully ascertained from them the time of the stars appearing. (**Matthew 2:7**)
- And, when sending them to **Bethlehem**, he said; Go make a careful search for the young child, and when you have found it report back to me, that I too may go and do it obeisance. (**Matthew 2:8**)
- When they had heard the king, they went their way, and, look! The star they had seen when they were in the east went ahead of them, until it came to a stop above where the young child was. (**Matthew 2:9**)
- On seeing the star they rejoiced very much indeed. (**Matthew 2:10**)
- And when they went into the house they saw the young child with Mary its mother, and, falling down, they did obeisance to it. They also opened their treasures and presented it with gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh. (**Matthew 2:11**)
- However, because they were given divine warning in a dream not to return to Herod, they withdrew to their country by another way. (**Matthew 2:12**)
- Although divine action prevented their visit from bringing death to the child Jesus, the town of **Bethlehem** and its surrounding territory suffered the loss of all its male children of two years of age and under, murdered at the order of King Herod.
- However, because they were given divine warning in a dream not to return to Herod, they withdrew to their country by another way. (**Matthew 2:12**)
- Then Herod, seeing he had been outwitted by the astrologers, fell into a great rage, and he sent out and had all the boys in **Bethlehem** and in all its districts done away with, from two years

of age and under, according to the time that he had carefully ascertained from the astrologers. ([Matthew 2:16](#))

- Then that was fulfilled which was spoken through Jeremiah the prophet, saying; ([Matthew 2:17](#))
- A voice was heard in Ramah, weeping and much wailing, it was Rachel weeping for her children, and she was unwilling to take comfort, because they are no more. ([Matthew 2:18](#))
- The inspired writer quoted the prophecy at,
- This is what Yehowah has said; In Ramah a voice is being heard, lamentation and bitter weeping. Rachel weeping over her sons. She has refused to be comforted over her sons, because they are no more. ([Jeremiah 31:15](#))
- As applying to what then occurred.

See Also RACHEL