

43 Bethlehem

Names (also known as)

Also known as Beit Lahm, Beit Sahur, Bet Lehem, Betar, Beth-Lehem, Beth-lehem-ephratah, Bethlehemjudah, Bit-Lahmi, City of David, Ephratah, Ephrath.

Etymology

Strong’s H1035 - *bêyth lechem* - “house of bread (food)” – also BDB.

Location/Description



Bethlehem is a Palestinian city located in the central West Bank, about 10 kilometers (6 miles) south of Jerusalem. It stands at an elevation of about 775 meters (2,543 ft) above sea level, 30 meters (98 ft) higher than nearby Jerusalem.

Its population is approximately 25,000 people. It is the capital of the Bethlehem Governorate. The economy is primarily tourist-driven. However, it is behind Israel’s huge security wall which makes access more difficult.

Scriptural references

Old Testament

Gen. 35:19; 48:7; 17:7,8,9; 19:1,2,18; Jud. 17:7,8,9; 19:1,2,18; Ruth 1:1,2,19,22; 2:4; 4:11; 1 Sam. 16:4; 17:12,15; 20:6,28; 2 Sam. 2:32; 23:14,15,16,24; 1 Chron. 4:4; 11:16,17,18,26; 2 Chron. 11:6; Ezra 2:21; Neh. 7:26; Jer. 41:17; Mic. 5:2.

New Testament

Matt. 2:1,5,6,8,16; Luke 2:4,15; John 7:42.

Famous characters

Jacob, Rachel, Naomi, Ruth, Boaz, Samuel, David, Joseph, Mary, Jesus

Brief history

Bethlehem, located in the "hill country" of Judah, may be adjacent to Ephrath ("fertile"), as there is a reference to it in Micah as Bethlehem Ephratah. Gen. 35:19; 48:7 seem to support that view. The sign below (passed in 2010) was a little distance from Bethlehem.



It is also called Bethlehem-Judah, and "a city of David". It is first mentioned in the Tanakh and the Bible as the place where the matriarch Rachel died and was buried "by the wayside" (Gen. 48:7). Rachel's Tomb, the traditional grave site, stands at the entrance to Bethlehem. According to the Book of Ruth, the valley to the east is where Ruth of Moab gleaned the fields and returned to town with Naomi. Bethlehem was the birthplace of David, the second king of Israel, and the place where he was anointed king by Samuel. It was from the well of Bethlehem that three of his warriors brought him water when he was hiding in the cave of Adullam.



Between AD 132 and 135 the city was re-occupied by the Romans after its capture during the Bar Kokhba Revolt. Its Jewish residents were expelled by the military order of Hadrian. The Romans built a shrine to the mythical Greek cult figure Adonis on the site of the Nativity. A church was erected in 326,

when Helena, the mother of Constantine, visited Bethlehem.

During the Samaritan revolt of 529, Bethlehem was sacked and its walls and the Church of the Nativity destroyed, but they were rebuilt on the orders of the Emperor Justinian I. In 614, the Persian Sassanid Empire, supported by Jewish rebels, invaded Palestina Prima and captured Bethlehem. Muslim armies captured it in 637, but the Crusaders took it in 1099.

In 1187, Saladin captured Bethlehem from the Crusaders, Bethlehem was briefly returned to Crusader control by treaty between 1229 and 1244. In 1347 the Franciscans gained possession of the Grotto of the Nativity as well as the right to administer and maintain the Basilica.

By the end of the 16th century, Bethelam had become one of the largest villages in the District of Jerusalem, and was subdivided into seven quarters. From 1831 to 1841, Palestine was under the rule Muhammad Ali Dynasty of Egypt. During this period, the town suffered an earthquake as well as the destruction of the Muslim quarter in 1834 by Egyptian troops, apparently as a reprisal for the murder of a favoured loyalist of Ibrahim Pasha.

In 1841, Bethlehem came under Ottoman rule once more and remained so until the end of WW1.



Bethlehem in 1880

Bethlehem was administered by the British Mandate from 1920 until 1948. In the United Nations General Assembly's 1947 resolution

to partition Palestine, Bethlehem was included in the special international enclave of Jerusalem to be administered by the United Nations.

Jordan annexed the city during the 1948 Arab-Israeli War. Many refugees from areas captured by Israeli forces in 1947-48 fled to the Bethlehem area. The influx of refugees significantly transformed Bethlehem's Christian majority into a Muslim one.

Jordan retained control of the city until the Six-Day War in 1967, when Bethlehem was occupied by Israel, along with the rest of the West Bank.

Following the Six-Day War, Israeli took control of the city, and held it until the Oslo peace accords allowed its transition to the Palestinian National Authority in 1995.

In 2002, 200 Palestinians, including 50 armed fighters entered and occupied the Church of the Nativity for 39 days. It became the site of a 5-week stand-off. The number of people inside was estimated between 120 and 240 hostages. Several militants were killed. It ended with an agreement to exile 13 of the wanted militants to various foreign countries.

The death of Rachel

Rachel is the type of natural Israel in Scripture – Jer. 31:15; Matt. 2:17-18; Mic. 4:7-10; 5:2-3 (based on Gen. 35:16-21). Yahweh brought forth His son from natural Israel in the place where “the son of the right hand” (Benjamin) was born towards the end of Israel’s national history. The OT prophecies were fulfilled, including the agonising loss of all children under 2 years of age in the area surrounding Bethlehem after Herod felt mocked by the Magi. However, the son of God, and son of David, had been removed to Egypt.

The most insignificant town in Judah, where David dwelt, had produced the most significant man ever to be born of a woman.

Sources:

Bible Encyclopaedia

Naves

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bethlehem>

(Compilers – Ron Leadbetter/Jim Cowie)