

Ancient Words—God in Control: House of Bread

Present day Bethlehem lies about 6 miles to the south of Jerusalem in Palestinian Territory and has a population of 25,000. The majority of population is Muslim but there remains a large Christian element due to the popularity of the Church of Nativity with Christian tourists from around the world. Bethlehem, meaning 'House of Bread' in Hebrew, was a small shepherding village in the days of Jesus' birth and probably numbered no more than 1,000 people. By comparison, Jerusalem is estimated to have had about 50,000 population in 1 BC. Ruth gleaned the fields of Boaz near Bethlehem and of course Jesse raised David in Bethlehem as well, making this town several hundred years old before the birth of Jesus. Interestingly, the fertile grain fields to produce bread and the green pastures with flocks of sheep for the birthing of lambs were both common and noted for the town of Bethlehem.

The prophet Micah prophesies the words of God about 400 years before in Micah 5.2: "But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me One who will be Ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times." There are actually two towns in Israel named Bethlehem. The other named town is just north of Nazareth which is north of Jerusalem. This Bethlehem of the north is referred to as Bethlehem by Zebulun (6th son of Jacob) while Bethlehem of the south is Bethlehem Ephrathah (Rachel's tomb is at Ephrath, another name for Judah, 4th son of Jacob). God is in total control of the exact location where his Son will be born. He has set in motion the grand plan for Christmas Day becoming reality. The place could have been Jerusalem, it could have been Nazareth, it could have been Bethlehem by Zebulun, it could have been anywhere on Galilee's shore—but it wasn't. The town was Bethlehem (of Judah) Ephrathah. The House of Bread, Bethlehem, was chosen for the Bread of Life; Ephrathah was chosen for the Lion of Judah. Thru the Father's choice, the world can choose to understand by faith that God precisely controlled all events leading to his Son's birth. Jesus, born in the House of Bread, is the Living Bread and the Bread of Life is available as eternal food for all to partake. Jesus is the Lamb of God whose birth was witnessed by shepherds watching over the birth of their lambs on Christmas Eve. Jesus is the Lion of Judah who will return to earth with power and judgment even for all who reject him.

God is in control in this 2016th year since Christ the Lord was born in the House of Bread. Jesus said in John 6.32-58: "I tell you the truth, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." The crowd responded: "Sir, give us this bread." Jesus then explains in further detail: "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty.....For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life.....I am the

bread that came down from heaven.....I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.....Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you.....but if you feed on this bread you will live forever.”

God remains in control because our life can be extended to eternal life thru the life sustaining bread provided thru his Son, the Living Bread born in the House of Bread. Celebrate Christmas with all the joy and hope and strength you possess for the Christ child, born in Bethlehem’s manger, is the Bread of Life for all who feed on him. The Ancient Words have spoken! “O holy child of Bethlehem, descend to us we pray; Cast out our sin and enter in, be born in us today. We hear the heavenly angels, the great glad tidings tell; O come to us, abide with us, our Lord Immanuel.” Sir, give us this bread!

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