

EXPLORATION: BIBLE

By Chip Thompson

Archeology in Bethlehem Supports the Story of Jesus

Long before Jesus was born a prophecy about the future Jewish Messiah was given by the Prophet Micah. In the 8th century B.C. Micah wrote: “But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are little among the clans of Judah, yet out of you shall come forth to Me the One to be Ruler in Israel, whose goings forth are from of old, from eternity” (Micah 5:2). For Jesus to be the true Messiah, he had to be born in Bethlehem of Judah.

We know Micah 5:2 was written long before the birth of Jesus because this prophecy is found in the Dead Sea Scrolls. The Micah scroll predates the birth of Jesus by over 100 years.



This is Qumran Cave #4 where the Micah scroll was found. [Photo by Archeologist Joel Kramer]

Believe it or not, today there are skeptics that challenge the traditional sight of Bethlehem as the birthplace of Jesus. They claim the Bethlehem visited by tourists today was not an occupied city in the 1st Century A.D. – when Jesus was born. But this is just nonsense, just another futile attempt on their part to undermine the trustworthiness of God’s word, the Bible. If you will go to YouTube, you can watch a short video called, “Unearthing the Prophecy of Jesus’ Birthplace” by Joel Kramer. This is a video about recent excavations in Bethlehem that totally settles this ridiculous ‘controversy’.

Today, the Church of the Nativity is located on the ancient Bethlehem Tell. This is the oldest standing Church in Israel. It was originally built in about 327 A.D. and was destroyed

and rebuilt several times. This church still stands today over the birthplace of Jesus.



The Church of the Nativity is a ‘Cruciform Church’ built in the shape of a cross. Just to the left of the church you can see the blue tarps that covered the 2015-2016 excavations in Bethlehem. These excavations firmly established Bethlehem as a 1st Century village of Judea. [Aerial photo of Bethlehem, by Joel Kramer]

The birthplace of Jesus is firmly established in history from the early centuries of the Christian Church. Beneath the Church of the Nativity is a cave that was marked as the very spot where Jesus was born. In 135 A.D. Roman Emperor Hadrian tried to erase the memory of Christianity from history by desecrating the Christian holy sites in Israel. In Bethlehem, above the cave where Jesus was born, Hadrian built a temple to the Roman god Adonis. This means that prior to 135 A.D. early Jewish Christians were coming to this cave to remember the birth of Christ and to worship him there.

We also have two early testimonies who identify this cave as the birthplace of Jesus.

JUSTIN MARTYR in A.D. 160 wrote, “But when the Child was born in Bethlehem, since Joseph could not find a lodging in that village, he took up his quarters in a certain cave near the village...”

ORIGEN OF ALEXANDRIA, in the 2nd Century wrote: “In Bethlehem the cave is pointed out where He was born, and the manger in the cave where He was wrapped in swaddling clothes...”



This is the cave structure beneath the Church of the Nativity where Jesus was born. It is sobering to think that God himself, as a human baby, was born in this cave, and laid in a stone manger used to feed livestock. [photo by Chip Thompson 2023]

The evidence found in Bethlehem clearly shows that Christians, from the first century onward, believed Jesus was the Messiah, the Savior of the world. If you choose to do so, you can question whether they were correct in their beliefs, but you cannot question the fact that Jesus was worshipped as the Messiah by the Jewish Christians who witnessed his life and ministry. They chose to believe in Jesus based upon the things they heard Jesus say and the miracles they saw Jesus do. Above all, they firmly believed in Jesus because he rose from the dead and they were eyewitnesses of his Glory. They believed in Jesus so completely that many of them died martyr’s deaths rather than deny him as Lord and Savior. Their total dedication to Jesus is evident because, in obedience to the command of Jesus to go into all the world and preach his gospel (Matthew 28:19-20), there are 2.4 billion Christians today living in every nation on planet earth.

This is strong evidence in support of the truthfulness of the biblical story of Jesus. In Bethlehem we have historical and archeological evidence that supports the story of Jesus. This evidence should at the very least warrant further investigation that I believe could lead you to a faith in Jesus as your own personal Savior.