

Bethlehem Ephrathah

14 Dec 2003

Micah 5:2 "But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel. His goings forth will be from long ago, from the days of eternity..."

I thought to give a little meditation for this Christmas season - possibly something quite new to most.

Bethlehem Ephrathah!

Why Bethlehem Ephrathah? The little village was and still is small and insignificant, yet God made a choice which has caused this village to be probably the most famous village in the world. When God makes a choice, you can be sure there is a good reason, and the choice would most certainly not have been done haphazardly. Imagine a heavenly conversation going something like this:

"O dear, we need a place for the Christ to be born. Let's see, where shall it be. Let's draw a lot. Oh, it has fallen on Bethlehem."

Bethlehem, where's that?

"Isn't it near Jerusalem somewhere?"

O well, I suppose it will do..."

No sir, I don't think it went like that. The choice was not haphazard by any means. It was a divinely appointed place, and a divinely appointed time. So why Bethlehem?

Bethlehem's history

Well, let's look at Bethlehem's history to see if we can find a clue to the reason for God's choice. We read the name, *Bethlehem Ephrathah*. Where does *Ephrathah* come from? Before we discover this, let's look at a lovely story of faith - seemingly unconnected to Bethlehem:

We read of the nation of Israel being led by God through the wilderness on their way to the promised land. As they came to the edge of the promised land, Moses chose twelve spies - leaders from each of the twelve tribes of Israel - and sent them to spy out the Promised land. You all know the story of how all twelve came back and testified of the goodness of the land. However, ten of the spies' knees were knocking for fear.

"There are fortified cities and giants in the land and we will never be able to conquer it," they cried.

However, two spies had greater insight and faith, and at the risk of their lives, they stated what they believed.

Num 13&14 "We can do it, because God is with us..." they said.

The two spies who spoke so positively were Joshua and Caleb, and of the two, Caleb seems to have been the main spokesman at the time. In response to their faith God made some wonderful promises to these two, mentioning Caleb's name first in Num 14:30, and only his name in Num 14:24. To him Jehovah particularly promised that his descendants would take possession of the land.

Caleb's request

Well Caleb remembered that promise, and forty-five years later, when he was eighty-five years old and when Israel had finally conquered the land under the leadership of Joshua, he approached Joshua with a most amazing request:

Josh 14:11 "I am still as strong today as I was in the day Moses sent me; as my strength was then so my strength is now, for war and for going out and coming in.

12 "Now then, give me this hill country about which YHWH spoke on that day, for you heard on that day that Anakim were there with great fortified cities; perhaps Jehovah will be with me, and I shall drive them out as Jehovah has spoken."

One would think that at eighty-five, Caleb would want to sit back and relax - but not Caleb! Of all places to choose from he wants the *hill country*, with *fortified cities*, in which the *Anakim* (giants) lived. I can just imagine Jehovah sitting and listening in to that conversation, and then turning to the angel Gabriel and saying, *"That's My boy!"*

Caleb's heritage passed on through generations

Caleb was not alone either - he had instilled this kind of bold faith into his family - his children. We read a little later (Josh 15:13-19) that Othniel, Caleb's nephew captured a city, and for his bold action, he won the hand of Caleb's daughter in marriage. Caleb's daughter in turn, is not satisfied with her lot and speaks out boldly,

requesting a piece of land with springs of water - she is a woman of foresight! I am sure Jehovah was well pleased with her request.

Why this story when we are actually dealing with Bethlehem Ephrathah? Well, if we read in 1Chr 2:18-20 we read that Caleb's wife had died, and he then remarried - his new bride's name being Ephrath, also called Ephrathah (1Chr 2:50). The place where they stayed became known as "Caleb-Ephrathah" (1Chr 2:24) Significantly we then read that two of Ephrathah's grandchildren were Kiriath-jearim (after whom the southern border city of Judah was named), and Bethlehem - hence the name, Bethlehem-Ephrathah! So, Bethlehem-Ephrathah was then a part of Caleb's heritage.

The story does not end here. We also see that the Rechabites were descendants of Caleb (1 Chr 2:55), and I am sure you know what a godly family they were, and how Jehovah promised that they would not be taken captive with the rest of Judah during the Babylonian captivity (Jer 35:1-19). This promise which was amazingly fulfilled in that when Nebuchadnezzar took the whole nation of Judah captive to Babylon, the Rechabites were some of the few people who were miraculously left alone on their land. Jehovah's promise to Caleb was thus further fulfilled.

Jehovah blesses those who are faithful

So, what is the significance of all of this? It is simply that Jehovah blesses a person who faithfully serves Him and trusts in him. Here we find Caleb being blessed for his faithfulness, and generation after generation of his

descendants not only being blessed, but also making a significant mark in the nation's history. Significantly we see two character-traits emerging from Caleb's family - one of *bold faith*, and the other of *humility with foresight*. The Rechabites were a humble and obedient family, who by not building fixed structures in their own land, (Jer 35:8-10) were *"looking for the city which is to come"*. Of such people Hebrews tells us that *"...God is not ashamed to be called their God; for He has prepared a city for them."* (Heb 11:16)

Significantly, then, we end with a most glorious blessing for Caleb's family, that the Messiah should be born in their humble town - Bethlehem-Ephrathah! Jehovah had not forgotten Caleb's faithfulness. Jehovah sees what we do, and rewards faithfulness even to following generations. The following Scripture is then so beautiful:

Mal 3:16 "Then those who feared Jehovah spoke to one another, and Jehovah gave attention and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before Him for those who fear Jehovah and who esteem His Name,

17 "And they will be Mine," says Jehovah of hosts, 'on the day that I prepare My own possession, and I will spare them as a man spares his own son who serves him.' ..."

Jehovah sees your labour of love for Him. During this Christmas season, when you read about Bethlehem-Ephrathah, just remember that Jehovah also knows you, and though you might seem to be insignificant, you are not *"too little among the clans of Judah"* for Jehovah to remember you and pour out His love and blessing upon you and your family.

May your home be filled with faith and love this
Christmas

With special love to you all

Henry D Jackson