

Migdal Edar – Merry Christmas!

Much of our understanding of the details of the Christmas Story is passed down to us from generation to generation and we naturally assume them to be true and accurate information. But this information can be colored by the carols we sing or the Christmas stories we hear from books or what we see in the movies. We sing ***Away in the Manger*** and set up our nativity scenes so we can visualize exactly what it would have looked like watching the actual event, frozen in time, thousands of years ago. I've often wondered how accurate our impressions really are as we try to visualize this event. I recently came across some information that may give a little clearer picture of the precise place where Jesus was born, and I only bring it up because, if it is true, it illuminates and reaffirms the bigger message of why Jesus came to earth.

It prophecies in the book of Micah 5:2 where the Messiah will come from... *But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting.*

This was a well known prophecy and the rabbis in Israel and even the wise men from Babylon knew that the city of Bethlehem would be the location where the Messiah would come from. But a few verses earlier, in Micah 4:8, it even gives a more specific location in Bethlehem where the birth of the Messiah would take place, *“And thou, O tower of the flock, the strong hold of the daughter of Zion, unto thee shall it come, even the first dominion; the kingdom shall come to the daughter of Jerusalem.*

On the west side of the Sea of Galilee there is another “migdal” that was used to guide fishermen to where the fish were. The town that grew around this tower was named after this tower. It was called Magdala, which was the town that Mary Magdalen came from.) In the phrase, *“the tower of the flock”* the word for “flock” is “edar”. “Migdal Edar” is the name of a specific military watch tower at the outer edge of the north side of Bethlehem, located in the field of “the flock”, about four miles from Jerusalem.

The Hebrew word for “tower” in this verse is “*migdal*”.

This tower (Migdal Edar) has some significant Biblical history. After Jacob buried Rachel in Bethlehem, he pitched his tent in the field just past this tower, *“And Rachel died, and was buried in the way to Ephrath, which is Bethlehem. And Jacob set a pillar upon her grave: that is the pillar of Rachel’s grave unto this day. And Israel journeyed, and spread his tent beyond the tower of Edar.”* (Gen 35:19-21)

This field may also have been the field where David watched his father’s sheep after he was in Saul’s service, *“But David went and returned from Saul to feed his father’s sheep at Bethlehem.”* (1 Sam 17:15)

This tower was located on the edge of the field where in Jesus’ day, a special flock of sheep were raised by rabbinical shepherds from Jerusalem. This was the flock of

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unblemished sheep that were raised for the temple sacrifices. These shepherds were very knowledgeable of the ceremonial laws of cleanliness and took very seriously, their job that the sheep were to be protected from harm and hurt because they had to be without blemish.

Migdal Edar was a two story tower that was covered to protect the watchman who looked over the horizon to be on guard of any impending danger from both human and animal enemies. The lower level of the tower was specifically used as the place where the lambs from the flock were born. It was ceremoniously clean and orderly. When a lamb was born, it was immediately wrapped up and placed in a small stall, (manger), where it could temporarily recuperate until it gained strength. This was done so it would be protected from harming itself on its unstable legs. This was the only function of the lower level of the Migdal Edar. The flock of sheep was kept outside 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. This was a holy place, set apart for the sole purpose of birthing the temple sacrificial lambs.

Now let's look at the possibility of our new perception of the nativity scene ... *"And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn."* (Luke 2:7) That's all the Bible says about this part of the story. When Joseph and Mary arrived in Jerusalem and there was no room for them at the inn, we assume the inn keeper offered them a place on the floor of his stable out back, surrounded by donkeys, cattle and various farm animals. What if instead, they were led to Migdal Edar? What better place could the Lamb of God have been born? It was clean, quiet and private, and it was symbolic. *"The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world... But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot... †For even Christ our Passover(lamb) is sacrificed for us"* (John 1:29, 1 Peter 1:19, 1 Cor 5:7)

Actually, much more is written about the angels proclaiming to the shepherds the good news... *"And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men. And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us. And they came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger. And when they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them*

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concerning this child. And all they that heard it wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds.’ (Luke 2:8-18)

When the shepherds decided to go see the babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, they said, *“Let us now go even unto Bethlehem...”* The word *“unto”* actually means *“until”*. In other words, they are going to the edge of Bethlehem which is where the Migdal Edar was located. I don’t know how large the field was or if these shepherds were the specific rabbinical shepherds who were watching their flock in that field that night, but they might have been, and they might have been aware of these prophecies and they seemed to know exactly where to go. They came in haste. I just don’t see them wandering about Bethlehem looking in every stable trying to find a baby who had just been born.

On the other hand, perhaps it may not even make that much difference if we don’t have an absolutely perfect understanding of the actual details of this event, as long as we believe that it actually happened around that approximate time and place where God personally went on a rescue mission and invaded our world, incognito, as a little baby, with the mission to save mankind from the death grip of Satan. God is not a bachelor. He has a Bride who He created, for the purpose of falling in love with her and having her love him back with that same passionate love. This is the greatest Story ever told, where God, made in the image of man, a little baby, invaded the world for the sole purpose of rescuing His Bride from the destruction and bondage of being kidnapped by Satan. In delivering her, He died Himself, but He rose from the dead and opened a door for His Bride to follow Him home to heaven, back to the Garden where they will live together, interacting forever in love with one another. This is the drama of the redemption of mankind where God is calling out of the world this special people for His Bride. Are you responding to His call to play your part in this great drama? Will you say *“I do”* to His love, and become His Bride? This is the most wonderful opportunity we’ll ever have in this life. When He calls you, don’t hesitate. You have a very special part to play in this drama and only you can play it. *“That’s why He came ... that we may have love”*

A very special and Merry Christmas to you and yours!

----- Foot note from Jim-----

PS: As a sidelight, the *“sign”* to the Shepherds and the reason they went to the Tower of the Flock was they were told the Messiah would be born and be wrapped in swaddling cloths and laid in a manger, just like they had seen so many times when the Passover lamb, destined for sacrifice for God’s people had been treated. The *“sign”* then is the understanding that not any baby boy would do...only the perfect lamb of God destined to be the Passover Lamb for all of us.

Prophecy revealed, and prophecy fulfilled yet hidden from us and so plain to those shepherds. Do we read the story and wonder about the First Noel? Perhaps we should

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also read the rest of the story and consider the Last Noel. Christ is coming again and not to be the Lamb of God but the King of Kings who will judge the world. Are we ready? Are we preparing as the Bride for the returning Bridegroom.

Trim your wicks, get ready, and be prepared to move when He comes for His Bride...our goal is be among those taken home with the Groom, the King of Kings