

Why Were Shepherds Involved in the Birth of Christ?

<http://hethathasanear.com/Birth.html>

<https://www.epm.org/resources/2008/Mar/11/shepherds-status/>

<https://blog.wabash.edu/immersionlearning201314/2014/03/14/story-of-bethlehem-sheep-more-than-legend/>

The Status of Shepherds

Normal shepherds were under the ban of Rabbinism, Edersheim says, on account of their necessary isolation from religious ordinances, and their manner of life, which rendered strict legal observance unlikely, if not absolutely impossible.

The first murder was of a shepherd (Abel) by a farmer (Cain) - Genesis 4:1-8 - Historically farmers hated shepherders or free ranging cattle because they would eat or damage their crops.

During the time of the Patriarchs, shepherding was a noble occupation. The wealthy sons of Isaac and Jacob tended flocks (Genesis 30:29; 37:12). Jethro, the priest of Midian, employed his daughters as shepherdesses (Exodus 2:16).

“Every shepherd is detestable to the Egyptians” (Genesis 46:34).

When Israel later settled in Canaan (c. 1400 BC), the few tribes still retaining a fondness for pastoral life chose to live in the Trans-Jordan (Numbers 32:1)

As the Israelites acquired more farmland, pasturing decreased. Shepherding became a menial vocation for the laboring class.

David’s emergence as king temporarily raised the shepherd’s image. The lowliness of this trade made David’s promotion striking (2 Samuel 7:8). But shepherding gradually lost its appeal and they came to be considered second-class and untrustworthy.

The Mishnah describes them as “incompetent” and says no one should ever feel obligated to rescue a shepherd who has fallen into a pit. They could not fulfill judicial offices or be admitted in court as witnesses. “To buy wool, milk or a kid from a shepherd was forbidden on the assumption that it would be stolen property.” - scholar Joachim Jeremias

Shepherds were officially labeled “sinners”—a technical term for a class of despised people.

In 'Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus,' Jeremias notes: “The rabbis ask with amazement how, in view of the despicable nature of shepherds, one can explain why God was

called 'my shepherd' in Psalm 23:1."

But ironically, Israel's religious leaders needed shepherds for a specific task - raising and providing sacrifices for the Temple.

See <https://www.epm.org/resources/2008/Mar/11/shepherds-status/>

The Tower of the Flock

http://www.seekingchrist.net/Micah%204_8%20Tower%20of%20the%20Flock.html

Micah 4:8 - "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."

"tower of the flock" = *migdal `eder* - a shepherd's watchtower near Bethlehem, a phrase sometimes used to stand for Bethlehem itself, and also to indicate for the royal line of David. (Also mentioned in as a military watchtower in Genesis 35:21, when Rachel died after giving birth to Benjamin)

"the first dominion" = the kingdom of David and Solomon

"the kingdom shall come" is interpreted by the Targum as "And thou, O Messiah of Israel, who art hid on account of the sins of the congregation of Israel, to thee the kingdom will come..."

The tower later became a watchtower for an overview of the flocks kept around that area about a mile north of Bethlehem and 4 miles from Jerusalem. (The tower does not exist today, and archaeology has not found its ruins).

Targum of Jonathan on **Genesis 35:21-23**: "He spread his tent beyond Migdal Eder, the place where King Messiah will reveal Himself at the end of days."

Jerome notes this 'Tower of Eder' is about 1000 paces (a mile) from Bethlehem,"

Alfred Edersheim ('Sketches of Jewish Social Life') said Micah 4:8 is a prophecy indicating that the Messiah would be revealed from the "tower of the flock" (Migdal Eder) which is connected with the town of Bethlehem. (See also Micah 5:2-5)

Church church historian Eusebius also linked the announcement to the shepherds to the migdal eber tower.

"For here was the station where shepherd watched their flocks destined for sacrifices in the Temple. So well known was this, that if animals were found as far from Jerusalem as Migdal Eder, and within that circuit on every side, the males were offered as burnt-offerings, the females as peace-offerings."

"Cattle found all the way from Jerusalem to Migdal Eder, and in the same vicinity in all

directions, are considered, if male, as whole-offerings, and if female as peace-offerings. " R. Jehudah says: "If they are fit for Passover-offerings they may be used for such purpose, providing Passover is not more than thirty days off." (Babylonian Talmud, Book 2: Tract Shekalim 7:4)

It was a settled point that, according to the Jewish fathers, Messiah, the Son of David, was to be born in Bethlehem of Judah.

It seems of deepest significance, almost like the fulfilment of type, that those shepherds who first heard tidings of the Savior's birth, who first listened to angels' praises, were watching flocks destined to be offered as sacrifices in the Temple. They were not ordinary shepherds but served the sacrificial system of the Temple.

The daily Temple sacrifice required two unblemished sheep from Bethlehem - one sacrificed in the morning and one in the evening as a continual sacrifice before the Lord.

Numbers 28:3 - "And thou shalt say unto them, This is the offering made by fire which ye shall offer unto the LORD; two lambs of the first year without spot day by day, for a continual burnt offering."

Anywhere from 706 to 770 sacrificial lambs were needed each year. On Passover, more than 250,000 sheep were required.

Edersheim points out that the shepherds would have soon after gone to the Temple with their animals for sacrifice, and there acted as heralds of the Messiah's birth, their announcement probably heard also by Simeon and Anna.

"And when they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child. And all they that heard it wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds" (Luke 2:17-18).

The flocks arrayed around the migdal eder were pastured there in preparation of being used as sacrifices in the Temple. Awassi sheep (native to the Middle East) lamb twice a year, in the spring and in the fall, which is rare in other sheep breeds.

The lambs were born in this "tower of the flock" known as Migdal Eder under the watchful eye of the shepherds who would then inspect and either certify them for use as sacrifices in the temple or designate them to be released for common use. The new lambs would, according to some sources, even be wrapped in special swaddling clothes once certified.

The Mishnah expressly forbids the "keeping of flocks throughout the land of Israel, except in the wilderness and the only flocks otherwise kept, would be those for the Temple-services" (Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of the Messiah*, Book II, chapter VI)

The Talmud (Bava Kamma 80a) refers to a she-goat kept at home for milk as an "armed

bandit" because "small animals habitually graze on the vegetation of others, thereby stealing their crops." They were allowed only if kept in the house and tied up.

"His students asked Rabban Gamliel: What is the halakha with regard to raising small domesticated animals in Eretz Yisrael? Rabban Gamliel said to them: It is permitted. The Gemara interrupts its citation of the baraita to pose a question: How could Rabban Gamliel say this? But didn't we learn in the mishna: One may not raise small domesticated animals in Eretz Yisrael?"

One of the objections to the birth of Jesus in the winter was that shepherds would not be with their flocks in the open, but rather enclosed and sheltered. But this was not the case with these sheep, bound for sacrifice at all times of the year, even "30 days before Passover."

The tense used in the original Greek of **Luke 2:12** shows He will be found "having been swaddled" without any indication of what that "swaddling" consisted of. So, it is not a stretch to see the newborn Yeshua in the sign of "the manger" of the birthing room of Migdal Eder "having been swaddled" in the bands used on the tamyid lambs brought there for inspection before sacrifice.

No Room

Luke 2:7 - "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."

The Greek word used in Luke 2:7 for "inn" is *kataluma*, which is the same Greek word translated as "guestchamber" elsewhere (**Mark 14:14; Luke 22:11**).

When Joseph and Mary arrived in Bethlehem, she was noticeably pregnant and ready to give birth. They stayed probably in Joseph's ancestral home. But there was no room in the guestchamber where they were staying for the separation required by Mary's giving birth.

While she was ritually unclean, she had to live separately from the rest of the family so as not to defile the people in the household and by her presence rendering them ceremonially unclean. Therefore, during those times, the woman would leave and stay in a nearby area where she would not defile the home. After the required length of time and bathing in a *mitzveh* bath, she would return to the household.

So the couple went to the cave beneath the nearby migdal eder, which served both as a stable/stall and feeding crib or "manger" for the animals but also contained two limestone slabs with depressions where the newborn lambs were swaddled in binding cloths to keep them from hurting themselves and rendering themselves unclean while the Temple shepherds examined them for blemishes to determine if they were suitable for sacrifice.

Later, the angels tell the shepherds - who were not at the migdal eder but with the

sheep in the fields - "Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger." (**Luke 2:12**)

It actually says "the" manger, using the definitive article - the shepherds knew it was the "manger" at Migdal Eder back on the edge of Bethlehem Ephratha.

Swaddling Clothes

While swaddling "cloths" were used in the handling of newborn babies, swaddling "bands" (as referenced in **Job 38:9**) were used for subduing animals prior to sacrifice. These "swaddling bands" were strips of gauze-like cloth used to restrain a lamb being prepared for inspection before sacrifice to prevent thrashing so that they not "blemish" themselves. A sacrifice had to be "bound" (Hebrew `aqad) in order to be valid. "Binding" an animal for sacrifice is the Hebrew *Akeida* (ibid, Hebrew Glossary and Terminology); specifically mentioned in Abraham's "binding" of Isaac) for sacrifice to the Almighty in **Genesis 22:9**.

- <http://hethathasaneer.com/Birth.html>

Why was Jesus born in a manger?

<http://www.pas.rochester.edu/~tim/study/Why%20a%20manger.pdf>

<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/541786b2e4b00c72b220c458/t/584492525016e1d55a3af0b3/1480888915372/%231+The+Shepherds+Sign+-+3+pages+together.pdf>