

## **MARY HAD A LITTLE LAMB**

“Mary had a little lamb, whose fleece was white as snow. And everywhere that Mary went; the lamb was sure to go. It followed her to school one day which was against the rule. It made the children laugh and play, to see a lamb at school.” Most of us are familiar with this nursery rhyme first published May 24, 1830, written by Sarah Josepha Haleon, and was inspired by an incident in which the same young girl, Mary Sawyer kept a pet lamb and brought him to school one day.

Today I bring to your attention a true story of a little Lamb also born to a Mary. Our story is not a nursery rhyme to comfort a sleepless child, but the story that will give comfort to any troubled soul. This story has the power to deliver any believing person from eternal perdition to a home in Heaven forever.

Our story begins with:

### **1. THE PLACE**

In Genesis 35:15-21 we see that Jacob, also known as Israel, journeyed from Bethel to the community of Bethlehem where his wife, Rachel went into hard labor and died giving birth to a boy whom she named Benoni which means “Son of My Sorrow.” Then soon after she expired, Jacob re-named him Benjamin, meaning “Son of the Right Hand.” I bring to your attention that Genesis 35:19 pinpoints this important place to an exact location: “And Rachel died, and was buried in the way to Ephrath, which is Bethlehem.” Many years later while Jacob was dying in Egypt, he reminds Joseph, the oldest son of Rachel, where his mother was buried, “And as for me, when I came from Padan, Rachel died by me in the land of Canaan in the way, when yet there was but a little way to come unto Ephrath: and I buried her there in the way of Ephrath; the same is Bethlehem” (Genesis 48:7). After Jacob buried Rachel and placed a pillar on her grave, an even more specific location in Bethlehem is revealed, for in Genesis 35:21 it says, “And Israel journeyed, and spread his tent beyond the tower of Edar.” The Hebrew word for “tower” is *migdal* and the Hebrew word for *edar* is translated into English as “the flock.”

Advancing further into time, according to Jewish history, the fields surrounding Bethlehem were commonly known to all Israelites as the place where the lambs were birthed and brought up for the Temple sacrifices. Watchtowers were constructed throughout Israel to watch for approaching enemy and also used by shepherds to watch over their sheep. The tower at Bethlehem was very special, for it was in this place where the sacrificial lambs were birthed. The towers were two stories tall, the uppermost used for a lookout and the bottom for the ewes to be brought in from the elements to birth the lambs. The manger in this locale was ceremonially pristine clean because just a few short miles from this place they would be sacrificed in Jerusalem. This pure place was also equipped with

swaddling cloths that were used to wrap the little lambs up as soon as they were born. The purpose was to restrict the movements of the lambs so they would not hurt themselves or mar a leg, an ear, a snout or any portion of the delicate newborn lamb's body. Then when the lambs were mature enough not to wobble around, they were loosed from the swaddling cloths. This is in correlation with the early requirement of the Passover Lamb: "Your lamb shall be without blemish..." (Exodus 12:5). Whenever a lamb was offered up for a sin or a peace offering, he must be absolutely without blemish, "And he shall offer his offering unto the LORD, one he lamb of the first year without blemish for a burnt offering, and one ewe lamb of the first year without blemish for a sin offering, and one ram without blemish for peace offerings" (Numbers 6:14). Thus, we see the simple swaddling cloths served a very important purpose.

## **2. THE PROPHECY**

Micah prophesied to the children of Israel warning of the captivity that comes to a disobedient people, but also giving them hope that in their land of Israel one day a King will come who will redeem them and bring them back to their homeland. The Deliverer is identified: "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" (Micah 5:2). The prophecy is that although Bethlehem Ephratah is one of the smaller communities in the earth, a Ruler is coming who shall be a man, but more than a man. Micah tells us that His "goings forth" are not only "from old" but "from everlasting." This can only reference one Person, i.e., God of very God! "Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God" (Psalm 90:2). "Thy throne is established of old: thou art from everlasting" (Psalm 93:2).

In the previous chapter Micah gives a strong promise that Messiah will come when he says, "And I will make her that halted a remnant, and her that was cast far off a strong nation: and the LORD shall reign over them in mount Zion from henceforth, even for ever" (Micah 4:7). Then in the next verse God, through Micah, gives even more specificity: "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" (Micah 4:8). Do you see the phrase, "tower of the flock"? This is the "Migdal Edar" (Tower of The Flock) referenced in Genesis 35! Migdal Edar is also mentioned by the Jewish Targums and is translated "The Anointed One of the flock of Israel." Targum Yonatan, cited by Rabbi Munk, paraphrases Genesis 35:23 and Micah 4:8: "He spread his tent beyond Migdal Edar, the place where King Messiah will reveal Himself at the end of days."

## **3. THE PLAN**

From The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah by Alfred Edersheim published in 1883, we read, "That the Messiah was to be born in Bethlehem was a settled conviction. Equally so was the belief that He was to be revealed from Migdal Eder, "the tower of the flock." This Migdal Eder was not the watchtower for the ordinary flocks which pastured on the barren sheep ground beyond Bethlehem, but lay close to the town, on the road to Jerusalem. A passage in the Mishnah leads to the conclusion that the flocks, which pastured there, were destined for Temple-sacrifices, and, accordingly, that the shepherds, who watched over them, were not ordinary shepherds."

When we read Luke 2:7-20, our eyes are opened. Would you not claim with me, "Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law" (Psalm 119:18)? These shepherds were commissioned by the priests of the temple to watch over, aid birth to, inspect, approve and present these lambs to Jerusalem for sacrifice. One source tells us these special shepherds, in fact, may have been priests themselves. When the angel therefore told the shepherds that the Christ (the Messiah) was born, they were told it took place in the City of David, which is Bethlehem (Luke 2:11,4). Then Luke 2:12 says, "And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger" (Luke 2:12). The Bible says, "And they came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger" (Luke 2:16). The shepherds did not need a star or anyone to guide them. They knew the only manger in Bethlehem where swaddling cloths were used was the Tower of the Flock. And according to prophecy, it all made sense! The place where the Passover lambs were born became the place where the one and only and final Passover Lamb was indeed born. "And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them" (Luke 2:20).

If you will excuse my lack of gifting as poet and allow me the muse as a student of the Word of God, I close with this re-working of the old nursery rhyme:

Mary had a little Lamb,  
His fleece was white as snow.  
He was destined to the throne of God,  
But to the cross must go  
To buy our sin-cursed souls one day  
From Satan's horrid rule,  
And from the grave up He came;  
Satan played the fool!  
Now believing lambs are saved,  
Never more to roam-  
Making heaven not just a place,  
But our eternal home.

-Pastor Pope-