

Beth-lehem

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But thou, Beth-lehem 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

Jacob and Rachel

But a little way to come to Beth-lehem,
and the pains came hard upon her. She heard,
“Fear not; thou shalt have this son also.”
She called him Son of My Sorrow as she died;
Jacob, already grieving, wanting no thought of death
in his son, called him Son of My Right Hand—
Benjamin. He marked Rachel’s grave with a pillar.
Decades passed, and he lay sick upon his deathbed,
remembrance still keen upon him. Joseph,
brother to Benjamin, brought him grandsons,
to be named new tribes in Israel. Jacob’s words,
halting, “Rachel died by me in Canaan,
when yet there was but a little way
to come to Beth-lehem.” Yea, though a sword
pierce your souls, he shall wipe away all your tears.

Ruth and Naomi

All Beth-lehem wondered when they saw her:
“Is this Naomi?” Ten years of famine
they had suffered, but she had lost more,
a husband and two sons. “I went out full;
the Lord has brought me home again empty.”
Not empty, for Ruth followed her still,
Moabite daughter-in-law choosing a new God.
Yet, no men to work the dead husbands’ land.
In Beth-lehem—house of bread—others harvested
barley and wheat, while Ruth gleaned, picking kernels
among the sheaves. She found kindness in Boaz.
Near kinsman, he could redeem the dead men’s land,

raise children to their name, that the family
not die with their deaths. In the city gates,
he asked for Ruth the widow, before other kin,
before witnesses, to take her to wife.
To them was born Obed, father of Jesse,
father of David. And Naomi, holding
the newborn in her arms, heard the women say,
"Blessed be the Lord. The babe shall restore
your life, nourish your old age, for your daughter,
who loves you, has borne him." Eternal king
shall be his name, and in him you shall live.

David and Samuel

He led a heifer and held a horn of oil,
yet the elders of Beth-lehem trembled.
"Are you come peaceably?" they asked.
"Peaceably," he answered, "to sacrifice to God.
Now sanctify yourselves, and come with me."
Samuel called for Jesse. Seven sons
passed by him. But, "the Lord has not chosen these.
Are all your children here?" So Jesse sent
for the youngest, keeper of his sheep.
And God said, "Arise, anoint him: for this is he,"
David the future king. Through years of exile,
the promise waited. Hunted by Saul, David
fled to the desert. At harvest time, in his cave,
he longed for home. "Oh, to drink the water
of the well by the gate of Beth-lehem."
Philistines held his town. Three of the mighty
broke through the host, drew water, brought it
to David. "This is the blood of men who went
in jeopardy of their lives," he said, then poured
the water on the ground, for the Lord.
When Messiah comes, the Anointed One,
he will give you water that will be in you
a well springing up to everlasting life.