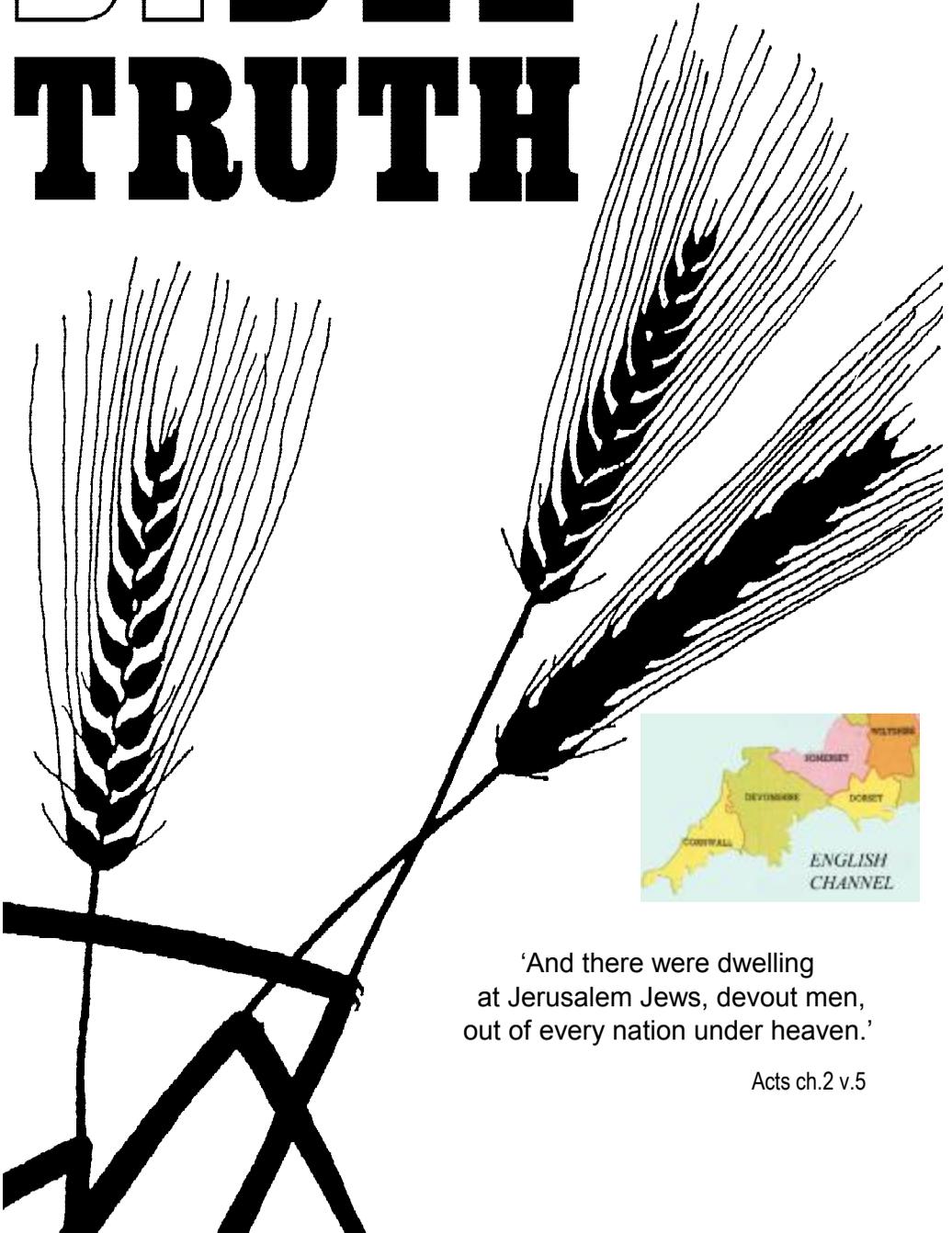


BIBLE TRUTH

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‘And there were dwelling
at Jerusalem Jews, devout men,
out of every nation under heaven.’

Acts ch.2 v.5

Bethlehem Bulla - Ancient Seal Unearthed

by Paul Boyd-Lee



Overlooking the Kidron Valley

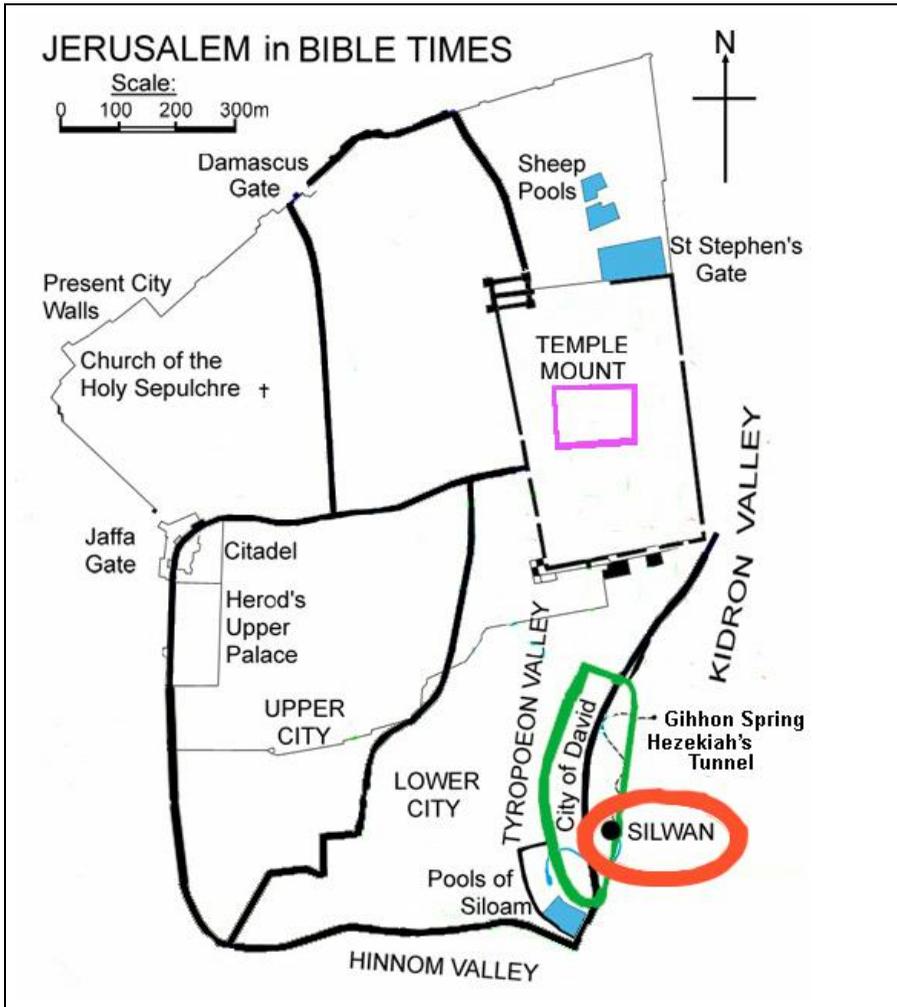
In May 2012 the press reported that a 2700 year old seal impression had been discovered in the old City of David (South Jerusalem); it bears the inscription 'Bethlehem'.

The Seal's imprint seems to provide evidence that Bethlehem was not just the name of a fabled biblical town of 7th c BC, as some have said, but was a bustling place of trade linked to the nearby city of Jerusalem.

The bulla (seal impression) measured 15 mm (0.6 inches) in diameter and dates back to the period of the first biblical Temple at the time when kings reigned over Judah, 700 years before Jesus was born. The Seal is written in the ancient Hebrew script of that period and pottery found nearby also confirms its dating. It was most likely used to seal an administrative tax document sent from Bethlehem to Jerusalem and hence it is called a 'fiscal' bulla.



The first line reads 'Bethshavah'at', translated as 'in the seventh', probably referring to the year of the king's reign. The second line contains the key element, the crumbling letters of the word 'Bethlehem'. The third line has the one letter 'ch', with the rest missing but probably makes up the word 'melech' translating as King (see Genesis ch.20 v.2 'Abi-melech King of Gerar', & Jeremiah ch.38 v.10 'Ebed-melech') meaning 'servant of the king').



The find was part of the excavation in the area of modern Silwan, just outside the city wall to the south of Jerusalem overlooking the Kidron Valley, and was directed by Eli Shukron on behalf of the Israel Antiquities Authority. The Seal was possibly placed on a tax shipment of silver or agricultural produce sent from Bethlehem to the King of Judah in the nearby city of Jerusalem.

Fox News reports that there are only about 40 seals like this to have been found which date to the time of the first Jewish Temple. This is a significant find not only because such seals are rare but also it is the first to mention 'Bethlehem'.

Shmuel Achituv, an expert in ancient texts at Israel's Ben Gurion University says, 'apart from the seal all the other mentions of Bethlehem are only in the Bible'. The Seal was found some months ago but time was needed to confirm its identity. Three experts concurred the seal says 'Bethlehem'. Bethlehem about five miles (8 km) south of Jerusalem is mentioned repeatedly in the Bible as the burial place of Rachel (wife of Jacob - Israel). It is also the setting of the Book of Ruth and the hometown of King David as well as the place of his anointing. This was the Ruth who was King David's grandmother. Later of course the town became the birthplace of Jesus.

GEMARIAH'S BULL BOOKLET & BOOKMARK

Another important set of Bullae was discovered in Jerusalem a few decades ago. These confirm the existence of several Old Testament characters including Gemariah the son of Shaphan the scribe mentioned a number of times in the Book of Jeremiah. This booklet and accompanying bookmark tell the story.

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