

Place of Pain

Scripture Reading — Genesis 35:16-20

So Rachel died and was buried on the way to Ephrath (that is, Bethlehem).
Genesis 35:19

—
We first find mention of Bethlehem in Genesis. It is near Ephrath, or Bethlehem, that Rachel dies while giving birth to her son Benjamin. It is near Bethlehem that Rachel is buried. Bethlehem literally means "House of Bread." But for Rachel's husband, Jacob, the town doesn't live up to its name. Bethlehem is a house of empti-ness, sorrow, and death.

In spite of romantic overtones that the name carries for us during the Christmas season, in Scripture Bethlehem doesn't represent a utopian paradise. It's associated with hurt-even hopelessness. Bethlehem is a living sign that the way of the Savior will not be the way of glory but the way of suffering.

How sobering to realize that Bethlehem still witnesses brokenness today. Recently I gathered for meetings with Christians from across the Middle East. There, I met with Palestinian Christians from the town of Bethlehem. Their personal experience of conflict in the Middle East brought home to me the sad truth that Bethlehem still struggles with the terrible tragedy of a fallen world.

But these Palestinian believers claim that the Christ born in their hometown came to reconcile all whose divisions seem insurmountable. For the conflicts of this world-as well as for the personal conflicts of our own lives-Jesus is our true hope of healing.

Prayer

Lord, the tears of Jacob, weeping over the tomb of Rachel, are our tears too. Come among us with your healing grace and tear down walls of division. Amen.

Devotion topics: [Seasons](#), [Christmas](#)

<https://today.reframemedia.com/devotions/place-of-pain-2007-12-19>

Printed on July 16, 2019

