

Ruth's Produce

Isaiah 9:6-7

“For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David’s throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the LORD, Almighty will accomplish this.”

Tid-Bit Information: Bethlehem is a small village, 5-6 miles south of Jerusalem. Land is hilly—with lots of rocks. Temperature can be 25 to 75 degrees. May through October no rain and December through March is the rainy season. On the road to Bethlehem you would see scrubby trees—oak, cedar, olive, and myrtle are some. Most people walk to Bethlehem from Jerusalem on a narrow winding road. One could possibly travel 15 miles on a good day. They would never travel on the Sabbath. Roads from Jericho to Jerusalem were very treacherous, steep, narrow, and lots of places for robbers to hide. In Bethlehem you could find many beggars too. Just east of Bethlehem you can see the white and chalky wilderness of Judea.

Getting Married: Ages of bridegroom 17-18 and bride 13-17. The father of the bridegroom-to-be would go to the father of the bride to negotiate a bride price that his son is willing to pay in exchange for marrying her (A young woman was regarded as an asset, and consequently the girl’s father expected to be compensated for his loss.) Once negotiations were complete, a betrothal ceremony took place in front of witnesses. For the next 12 months, the usual period of betrothal, the couple was considered practically married. A child born during that waiting period was considered legitimate. But it was not until the wedding ceremony that the bride left her father’s house to move with the bridegroom or his family.

CENSUS: the Romans started the census system shortly before Jesus' birth. They require registration every 14 years. People were required to return to the place of their birth to get their property registered so Rome would know how much tax would be charged. The Roman soldiers would be intolerant of the fanatical Jews—but tolerant of the quiet Jew. They can compel anyone to carry their burden for one mile.

Jewish Marketplace: Narrow streets, noisy, aggressive sellers, smelly. Bartering is the way to buy—don't walk up and pay the first price. Food in the marketplace comes in from local areas. Spices and citrus fruit are shipped in and more expensive. Have olive oil for lamps, cooking, and medicine, bread, vegetables, and fruit. No corn around in the 1st century.

Baskets would be cheap, not considered a high skill labor, 20 lepta. Sandals, pottery would be more expensive. Barter grain in bushels. Consider how long and skilled an item requires and barter accordingly.

CUSTOMS: Business as property transfers, marriages, etc. was transacted at the village gate. The Elders sat on benches there. The SYNAGOGUE is a place of learning. Scribes are experts of law and instruct in the synagogue. Priests serve in the Temples ONLY—there was no Temple in Bethlehem. Women didn't have equal rights—only in work. They worked in the fields alongside men. Women and girls were not forbidden in synagogue but were held to the back. Houses were small but always had a guest room—even tents had guest rooms. Animals often housed under or near houses—often goats and sheep come into the city at night. A farm would be the size of 4-6 acres. Most families kept a goat or two to milk, a few sheep for wool, and one or two donkeys or oxen as draft animals. Chickens or other fowl were in the courtyard.

COINS OF THE TIMES: Roman coins—silver **denarius** (plural is denarii) was wages for 1 day of common labor. Greek coins—**drachma** is about the same as a denarius. Double drachma was used for paying the Temple tax. (No temple in Bethlehem) so this is why they would need money changers.

Jewish coin- **lepta** (translated the same as mite) is small in value (fraction of a penny) It would take about 80 lepta to equal 1 denarius. **Shekel** is an Old Testament term and it is possible to be used as a weight of silver or gold (4-5 oz). Herod had his own coins too. In Old Testament times people bought either by exchanging goods or by paying an agreed weight of silver or gold, for instance, a shekel is a weight, not a unit of currency. **Talent** was equal to 3,000 shekels.

The farmer's year was divided into 3 seasons planting (Sept-Nov), Harvesting (Feb-Mar), and vintage (May-June) tending to grapes, figs, and other fruits. **You will have grapes, raisins and apples that will need to be cut up and put into baskets. Walk around the visiting families giving out samples. There will also be an assortment of fruits and vegetables on display. You can put some of these in baskets also.**

Conversations:

Introduce yourself. Ask where they are from. Occupation? For such a large family you will need provisions for the journey home.

Ask how the growing season went.

Tell about your product "Good harvest-planted early-plenty of rain. Inspect our product and you will find no bugs or bruises and just harvested. Price: start at 2 denarii/ bushel, and then come down as you barter."

Time filler: Help picking the apples. Do you have any family members that can come and help harvest. How are the Roman soldiers treating you? Have you found a place to stay? (Remember your guest room is filled.) They can pick up their purchases in the morning.