

# Bethlehem Baskets

## 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 1<sup>st</sup> 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 along side of 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 house—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.

**Basket Weaving:** Sites in Middle East show that weaving techniques were used to make mats and possibly baskets around 8000 BCE. Baskets made with interwoven techniques were common at 3000 BCE. Four kinds of baskets come to view in the OT under the Hebrew names: Dudh, Tene', Cal and Kelubh. There is little info in these names to indicate what the

difference of size and shape and use were. The baskets were variously made of straw, willow, rush, palm leaf, etc. and were used for various purposes.

**1. Dudh:** basket Israelites used to carry clay for bricks. Dudh is used for the “pot” in which meat was boiled (Sam 2:14). **2. Cal:** the commonest basket. It was used by the court-baker of Egypt carried about confectionery on his head (Gen 40:16) See also Gen 40:16, Judges 6:19 Ex 29:3, Lev 8:2 Nu 6:15. It was a dish shaped basket in many sizes. **3. Tene’:** was a large deep basket, in which grain and other products of garden or field were carried home and kept (Dt 28:5,17), in which the first-fruits were preserved (Dt 26:2), and the tithes transports to the sanctuary (Dt 26:2f). It has been thought probable that the chabya, the basket of clay and straw of the Israel peasantry of today, is sort of survival or counterpart of it. It has the general shape of a jar, and is used for storing and keeping wheat, barley, oats, etc. At the top is the mouth into which the grain is poured and at the bottom is an orifice through which it can be taken out as needed, when the opening is again closed with a rag. The Septuagint translates Tene’ by kartallosm, which denotes a basket the shape of an inverted cone. **4. Kelubh:** found in Am 8:1 for a “fruit-basket”, is used in Jer 5:27 for a bird-cage. It is not unreasonable to suppose that a coarsely woven basket with a cover would be used by a fowler to carry home his feathered captives.

After the basket material is soaked in water to soften them, weavers turn them into baskets that will serve different purposes. Baskets are mentioned in the Bible. For example, Moses was placed in a basket that floated down the river where Pharaoh’s daughter found him. The Apostle Paul escaped Damascus by being lowered from the city walls in a basket. And as instructed in Deuteronomy, the Jewish people were to bring their first fruits to the temple in a basket that was placed before the altar. Not to forget God’s overflowing provision, after Jesus fed the 5000, the leftovers were gathered to fill 12 baskets.

**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.

### **Conversations:**

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

**Tell me about your product. Basketry is not a high-skilled job and material is cheap. So you will not have to pay a lot for a basket.**

**Are you in need of baskets to carry your belongings? Just found some beautiful rushes, palm leaves, straw that has been used in these beautiful baskets.**

**Time filler: Have you been counted or paid your taxes yet. Our family went early today. The Romans are asking for way too much for taxes. How are the Roman soldiers treating you? What have you seen on your travels? Do you still have many relatives in Bethlehem? Have you found a place to stay? (Remember your guest room is filled.) They can pick up their purchases in the morning.**

**\*\*\*Some of your workers can go through the village selling your baskets, "Baskets for Sale."**