

Wood Cutting

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.”*

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 there’s no rain, **December through March is the rainy season**. On the road to Bethlehem you would see scrubby trees—oak, cedar, olive, and myrtle. 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 (Judah).

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 (engagement), 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** to charge. The Roman soldiers would be intolerant of the “fanatical Jews” —but tolerant of the “quiet Jew”. They can **compel anyone to carry their burden (load) 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.**

Carpentry: As with any craft, each artisan **learned his trade from his father.**

According to tradition, one of the chief duties of a father is to see that his son learns a useful trade. A young boy learned early by watching his elders work, then **formal apprenticeship began when a boy was 15 years.**

Basic carpenter's tools included an **ax for chopping down trees,** and **adz for shaping wood, and a hatchet.** Also, essential were **iron saws** for cutting wood to precise sizes, a bow drill and bits for drilling holes through wood, a stone headed hammer for driving nails, a wooden mallet for pounding chisels or hammering wooden surfaces together, iron chisels and files for shaping and carving, awls for putting small holes into wood or leather, and a supply of nails.

In **Nazareth,** the principal choices were **sycamore,** a porous but durable softwood from a species of fig tree, olive wood, a fine-grained amber-colored hardwood, which grew in abundance in the area, and possible oak. Imported woods, such as **cedar and cypress** from Phoenicia, though used often in the big cities, were expensive and must

have been uncommon in Nazareth and other small communities. The carpenter spent his time making farm tools, house construction parts, furniture, and kitchen implements. Farm tools ranged from wooden carts with wooden wheels, the threshing boards, plows, winnowing forks, yokes, and handles for various metal tools. Furniture would be tables, chairs, and storage boxes.

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. You could be apprentices from Ezra's Sandals and Wood. You gather and cut wood for his shop. Do you have strong family members that could help us cut wood? You may have some wood for a warm fire later.

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?