

# Daniel's Pottery

## 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 alongside 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.

**Pottery:** Of all the other craftsmen in rural areas, the potter was perhaps the most needed and the most artistic and creative. The numerous references to pottery in Scripture reflect its importance on daily life. The potter supplied the community with household ovens, oil lamps, and earthenware containers of every size and shape. These pots and jars were

used for cooking and for storing all sorts of necessities, from drinking water to precious oils, from seed and grain to wine. On occasion, they were even used to store important documents.

The potter's basic tools were his wheel and his kiln. His basic material, clay, was readily available in the area, needing only be dug up, but not ready to form. The potter may leave the clay in the sun for a time and then he probably pounded out lumps and picked out the debris. He then added water and mixed it thoroughly, treading the clay with his feet to give it an even consistency. Once again he let the clay sit for several days, siphoning off any excess water. Finally, he folded and kneaded the clay to remove air pockets, often adding a binder as he did so.

When the potter was satisfied with the clay, he started to shape it into the pieces he needed. There were many ways to form a vessel. Some pieces were shaped entirely by hand; others were made by coiling up a rope of pliable clay, still others were made by pressing fold out sheets into molds. Many pots were formed on a potter's wheel, a device used as long ago as 3000 BC and still used by potters today. The wheel has two horizontal wheels, one at foot level and the second held the lump of clay to be molded, joined by an axle.

The shaped vessels were put aside to set up, and trimmed to remove excess clay with a knife. Sometimes the potter would incise simple decorations or cover it with slip (clay and water solution) to make a smooth surface. A still finer lustrous surface was achieved by burnishing; the potter held a tool with a smooth hard surface (rock) against the dried clay and polished it smooth. Finally the potter fired up his kiln, a two story oven, and loaded it with a batch of pots. For at least three days the fires burned. First the potter raised the temperature just enough to allow the new clay to heat up safely; if he heated it too fast, any small pockets of water left in the clay would turn to steam and blow the pot apart. When the potter judged that he had reach the desired heat, he worked to maintain it at that level until the pottery reached the proper consistency; then, slowly, he brought the oven temperature down

again. The finished pottery was traded for other goods or sold at the potter's shop or marketplace.

**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 about your product. Much skill and time went into your pottery. Asking price should be high.**

**Time filler: Help digging clay. Do you have any family members that can come and help. 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.**