

# Fishermen

## 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.”*

**BACKGROUND: PLEASE NOTE:** Bethlehem does not have a lake nearby. “Walking alongside the Sea of Galilee he (Jesus) saw two brothers, Simon who is called Peter and Andrew his brother, letting down a fishing net into the sea, for they were fishers. And he said to them: “Come after me, and I will make you fishers of men.” (Matt 4:18,19)

In Palestine fish abound in the Jordan, the Sea of Galilee, and in the perennial brooks. Fishermen sailed wooden boats that were approximately 27’ long with about a 7.5’ beam. Many of their boats had a mast and a cabin like shelter under the stern deck. These slow but sturdy craft bore the stress of winds that pushed the sail and mast in one direction while the weight of a net tugged in the other. Men maneuvered the boat using oars. They would mostly use the dragnet approach; pull the net from shore out into the water, then go parallel with the shore, and come back to the beach to pull in their catch. Another method was the Cast-Net. Finally to fish from shore they would use a trammel net which was very labor intensive and complicated.

Today, as in first century, the most productive fishing grounds in the Sea of Galilee are located near the mouths of the many springs and rivers that feed the sea. In Jesus’ day most fishermen would fish at night and use torches to catch their quarry. They would go ashore and dump the net on the beach and sort the fish. They placed the acceptable ones in vessels. Some were sold fresh locally. Most were dried and salted or pickled, stored in clay

amphoras, and exported to Jerusalem or foreign lands. Creatures without scales or fins, such as eels, were considered unclean and were discarded. Nets were expensive and required hard work to maintain, so the men used them with care. Much of a fisherman's time was spent mending, washing, and drying nets—chores he performed at the completion of every fishing trip. Among the species of fish sought by first-century fishermen was the abundant tilapia. This species was a regular part of the diet for most people in Galilee. In the first century, successful fishermen were patient, hardworking, and willing to endure hardship in the pursuit of a worthwhile reward.

**Meats:** Food being eaten—stew pot may contain barley, lentils, vegetables, goat or lamb—very little beef and absolutely no pork or crustaceans (considered unclean). The Jewish family ate chicken or wild fowl. Fish was a common food, but red meat was a rarity, except on special occasions, when the fattened calf and the sacrificial lamb were presented with fanfare and ritual. Would have fruits, eggs, and lots of cheese.

**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.

**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. **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. **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: GUIDE and FISHERMEN will exchange greetings and fishermen will engage the guests in conversations.**

**Tell about your wonderful day of fishing. A miracle: that you were able to catch so many fish and they were large. Wonder why the LORD would bless your day so well. Ask if they had any special happenings on their journey to Bethlehem.**

**The family should share what they heard on the hillside with the shepherds: the angel visit.**

**The fishermen ask if the family could send back their fastest or strongest runner to share news of the Savior. Warn them about the thieves. Along the road and that the Roman soldiers are very mean in Bethlehem so guard what you say.**