

Jesus

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Home

Nazareth was located on a rocky Galilean hill some 1,300 feet in altitude, 20 miles from the Mediterranean Sea and 15 miles from the Sea of Galilee. The region was fertile, with many springs and ample rain that allowed extensive agriculture.

The people of Galilee spoke a dialect of Aramaic, and were looked upon as somewhat crude and uncultured by their fellow Jews, according to Henri Daniel-Rops in his 1958 book, *Daily Life in the Time of Jesus*.

"The people of Judea despised the Galileans as backward provincials who spoke with such an accent that there was no difference between their pronunciation of immar (lamb), hamar (wine) and hamor (ass)," Daniel-Rops wrote. "They were also suspected of being far from rigid in their observation of the Law."

Indeed, when invited to meet Jesus (John 1:46), Nathaniel pointedly asked, "Can anything good come from Nazareth?"

Jesus and his family would likely have lived in a house much like these of the other inhabitants of Nazareth.

The house would probably have been built of whitewashed mud brick. The house would have contained only a few rooms — perhaps just one — and either one or two stories. The floor of the first story was probably just the ground. It may have been built around or faced a central courtyard where Mary would have performed many of her household tasks. There would have been few windows in the house: Light was provided by oil lamps.

Most roofs were flat, made of woven branches and clay on rafters. They had to be smoothed and repaired each year and after heavy rains. Such roofs could also easily cut through, as in the case of the paralytic whose friends removed part of the roof to lower him down to Jesus (Mark 2:1-4). And even after being cut in that way, a roof could have been easily repaired.

A ladder or outside stairway led up to the roof so that families could eat, sleep or socialize there. The outer edge of the roof would have been surrounded by a parapet to help prevent people falling off.

Houses were sparsely furnished. Except among wealthy families, people generally slept on mats on the floor or on platforms attached to the walls. There might have been an oven and a few cooking utensils, a

few chairs or benches on which to sit, a low table on which to eat, and some storage chests and jars for food, clothing and personal items.

Daily bread

Two foods are frequently linked with Jesus in the Gospels: bread and fish.

At the Last Supper, he breaks bread. He calls himself as the bread of life. When he appears to the disciples in Galilee after the Resurrection, he is cooking fish. He used bread and fish to feed the 5,000. When discussing answers to prayers in Matthew 7:9 he says, "Which one of you would hand his son a stone when he asks for bread, or a snake when he asks for a fish?"

Bread would have been a key part of Jesus' diet. According to Daniel-Rops, "to eat bread" in Hebrew meant "to have a meal."

The poor ate barley bread; the wealthier ate wheat bread. Mary would have ground the grain herself, then baked the bread in the small household oven. Because bread would go moldy quickly, it was generally made every two to three days.

Fresh water fish from the Sea of Galilee and the upper Jordan were readily available. Generally they were dried, smoked, salted or pickled to preserve them.

Jesus' diet likely also included beans, lentils, cucumber, onions and such fruit as dates and figs, and nuts. Common people ate little meat, except on special occasions. Thus Jesus refers to the fatted calf being slaughtered to celebrate the return of the prodigal son.

His diet would also probably have included goat's milk, cheese made from goat's or ewe's milk, and honey.

Mary would have used garlic, mustard, mint, dill and other spices to help flavor food, and olive oil to help prepare it.

The cooked food would often have been served in a common dish, and eaten by dipping in with the fingers. Those gathered for the meal either sat around the low table, or reclined leaning on their left elbows. The meal may have been accompanied by wine — red wine, usually mixed with water.

If Jesus followed the custom of his fellow Nazareans, he would probably have eaten two meals a day. The first meal would have been a light one consumed in the morning or at midday at work. The second, later in the day, would have been with the rest of the family, and be much more substantial.

What they wore

If it was chilly when Jesus awoke that June morning, he likely used a tunic or

cloak to cover himself and keep warm. The tunic was the basic garment worn by both men and women. It generally consisted of two sections sewn together, with an opening for the head. The account of Jesus' death mentions a "seamless garment." According to John J. Rousseau and Rami Arav in their 1995 book, *Jesus and His World*, "A seamless tunic was probably a rare possession," and the fact that Jesus had one suggests that it had been given him by one of his wealthy supporters.

Over the tunic, Jesus would probably have worn a mantle or cloak. The outer garment was usually tied together by a leather belt or or cloth girdle.

While working, men sometimes wore just their tunics. A girdle worn over the tunic was called a loincloth. While working, men would sometimes tuck their tunics between their legs and into the girdle to free their legs for easier movement: This was referred to as "girding their loins." St. Peter was described as doing this in John 21:7 when out on a boat and seeing the risen Jesus, "he tucked in his garment, for he was lightly clad, and jumped into the sea."

Jesus likely wore sandals with palm bark or wood soles and leather straps or laces.

The carpenter's son

In the Mark 6:3, Jesus is referred to as "the carpenter." In Matthew 13:55, he is called "the carpenter's son."

Jesus would have begun to learn the trade as an apprentice in Joseph's shop:

Carpenters were among the most respected craftsmen. They produced home construction parts, tables, chairs, storage boxes, furniture, kitchen implements and such farm tools as carts, wheels, yokes, plows and winnowing forks.

Joseph and Jesus probably worked with such woods as sycamore, olive and oak. They may well have chopped down the trees themselves, then using axes, hatches and adzes begin to shape the wood. Their tools would also likely have included saws, a bow drill and bits for drilling holes, chisels, awls to bore holes, planes to shave wood, and rules for measuring.

The two would probably have worked out of their home or right next to it, and stored their tools in the home at night.

Rousseau and Arav speculate that because Nazareth was so small — they estimate 500 inhabitants, while other sources suggest as many as 2,000 — Joseph (and hence Jesus) would not have had enough local business to support themselves. Thus they may have done work for the inhabi-

tants of nearby towns such as Sepphoris, about four miles away, the home of Herod Antipas and the administrative center of Galilee until around 18-19 C.E. when Herod relocated to Tiberias. They may also have built or repaired boats for the fishermen on the Sea of Galilee — and thus may have known some of the fishermen who later became Jesus' followers.

The spirit and mind

Although by 18 C.E. Jesus may have been working as a carpenter, he would likely have had many years of education under his girdle. And a great deal of that education would have focused on the Torah, the sacred Hebrew Scriptures.

Around the age of 5, boys would have begun attending a "school," spending part of each day learning the letters of the Hebrew alphabet. They would then learn words or phrases from the Torah, and begin to commit passages to memory.

At 10, boys then began to learn the oral law — traditions and interpretations of the Torah to apply to daily life. One of the teaching methods was telling parables.

Formal education would have ended around the age of 13, except for gifted individuals who would continue studies under a group of teachers and a master.

Jesus likely attended synagogue each Sabbath. Prayer would probably have been part of his daily routine as well. Faithful Jews prayed at least three times a day, morning, noon and evening, and often facing Jerusalem. He may well have included some of the variety of prayers that could be said upon waking up, dressing, washing his hands and so on.

Understanding

Attempts to say precisely how Jesus lived is pure speculation. But studying the daily life of people of his time is of value when it comes to understanding the Scriptures, George Martin notes in the foreword of the 1981 edition of Daniel-Rops' book.

He cited the parable of the woman who searched for a lost coin in Luke 15:8. If we understand that the woman's home probably consisted of one dimly lit room with a dirt floor, then lighting a lamp and sweeping the whole house to find the coin becomes believable and understandable.

"The more that we can use (studies) to enter into the world of first-century Palestine, the more Jesus who walked and taught there will be able to enter our world through our reading of Scripture," Martin concluded.

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