

HIGHLIGHTS OF ARCHAEOLOGY IN BIBLE LANDS

by

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CHAPTER FOURTEEN

FIRST CENTURY COINS OF PALESTINE

KINDS OF COINS IN USE

In the time of Christ three kinds of metals were used in the making of money—gold, silver, and copper. Jesus was referring to these three varieties when He said to His disciples: “**Provide neither gold, nor silver, nor brass [copper] in your purses**” (Matthew 10:9). 1

COINS MENTIONED IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Copies of most of the first-century coins are to be found in the museums.

Silver Coins

1. The *denarius*, translated “penny,” or “shilling.” It was a Roman coin, and it was this that Jesus held in His hand when He said: “**Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar’s; and unto God the things that are God’s**” (Matthew 22:21). On one side is stamped the image of the emperor with words inscribed in abbreviated form the meaning of which is, “Tiberius Caesar Augustus, son of the divine Augustus.” On the other side is the image of the empress seated, and the inscription, “Pontifex Maximus” (high priest in Rome). Museums contain copies of this coin as minted by Tiberius Caesar. 2

2. The *drachma*, translated “piece of silver,” was a Greek coin. The coin that was lost by the woman Christ told about in Luke 15:8 was such a coin.

3. The *didrachma*, translated “tribute,” or “half-shekel.” It was double the value of the drachma, and was a Greek coin. The Jews were required to give the value of this coin as their temple-tax for one person. “**Doth not your master pay tribute?**” (Matthew 17:24).

4. The *stater*, translated “**a piece of money**,” also called “shekel.” It was this coin that Simon Peter found in the mouth of the fish, and with it the temple-tax for both Jesus and Peter was paid. (See Matthew 17:27). It was also a Greek coin. 3

Copper Coins

1. *Lepton*, translated “**mite**,” was a Greek coin. Two of these coins were cast into the temple treasury by the poor widow (Mark 12:42; Luke 21:2). It was the smallest Palestinian coin.
2. *Quadrans*, translated “**farthing**,” was a Roman coin and worth twice the value of a lepton (see Matthew 5:26; Mark 12:42).
3. *Assarion*, translated “**farthing**,” “**penny**.” There is a specimen of this coin that was struck by Pilate in the year A.D. 29, the year of the crucifixion. Examples of its use are found in Matthew 10:29 and Luke 12:6. 4

Archaeological value of certain coins. Some of the first-century coins are of interest because they preserve for us the likeness of buildings long since lost in their entirety. As an example, certain coins of the city of Ephesus have been found that have a representation on them of the ancient Temple of Diana with the statue of the goddess in the portico. 5

1. S. L. Caiger, *Archaeology and the New Testament*, p. 146.
2. *Ibid.*, pp. 146, 147.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 147.
4. *Ibid.*, pp. 147, 148.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 149.

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