

# The Occupations and Trades of Jesus Christ

## The Lord Jesus Christ Potter, Captain, Shepherd, and More

The multiple references in the Old Testament to trades and occupations reveal much regarding biblical industry and commerce and their impact on the life of the community. According to one source, “Agriculture, the basis of the economy in ancient Israel, influenced practically every facet of daily life, especially the religious, economic, legal, and social spheres.”<sup>17</sup> In addition to agricultural workers, a thousand Israelite artisans were “brought captive” by Nebuchadnezzar II, probably for their talents and skills: “And all the men of might, even seven thousand, and craftsmen and smiths a thousand, all that were strong and apt for war, even them the king of Babylon brought captive to Babylon” (2 Kgs. 24:16).

Old Testament prophets and writers referred to various trades, occupations, and vocations in a variety of contexts and settings, including the following:

1. Poetic texts (including Psalms, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes) and prophetic texts (including Isaiah, Joel, and Ezekiel). These texts refer to various occupations, often in symbolic expressions or figures of speech. Writers, for instance, have compared prophets to watchmen on the watchtower, missionaries to fishermen, and so forth.

2. Histories and narratives (including Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings, and 1 and 2 Chronicles). Histories and narratives mention occupations in order to explain facts and to provide context. For example, the accounts of David’s military

maneuvers against his enemies refer to soldiers and archers; and the author of Ruth, in the course of relating the narrative, wrote of farmers, harvesters, and midwives.

3. Legal texts (including portions of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy). Legal texts refer to occupations that were impacted by the law of Moses, such as judges, soldiers, and others.

4. Texts that contain prophecies (including Isaiah, Amos, Joel, and Ezekiel). These texts mention occupations in the context of the prophetic word. For example, Isaiah referred to a goldsmith (Isa. 40:19; 41:7), plowman (Isa. 28:24; 61:5), and potter (Isa. 29:16; 30:14).

5. Workers and Wage Earners. Most significantly, Old Testament prophets likened the Lord—the premortal Jesus Christ—to various workers and wage earners. For instance, the prophets compared the Lord to an advocate (Isa. 3:13), captain (Josh. 5:15), commander (Isa. 55:4), counselor (Isa. 9:6–7), guide (Ps. 48:14), judge (Gen. 18:25; Isa. 11:4; 33:22), potter (Isa. 64:8), servant (Isa. 42:1), shepherd (Ps. 23:1), teacher (Isa. 48:17), and woodsman (Isa. 10:33–34). Isaiah wrote that the Lord is a potter and we (mortals) are the clay: “But now, O Lord, thou art our father; we are the clay, and thou our potter; and we all are the work of thy hand” (Isa. 64:8).

The list of occupations and trades in the chart is representative and not comprehensive; additional scriptural references could be added to the chart.

Occupation	Scripture
ambassador	2 Chr. 35:21; Isa. 30:4
archers	1 Chr. 12:2
armor bearer	1 Sam. 14:12
artificer	craftsman; Isa. 3:3
astrologer	Isa. 47:13
baker	Gen. 40:1–22
barber	Gen. 41:14; 2 Sam. 19:24
blacksmith	Gen. 4:22; 1 Sam. 13:19
builder	Gen. 11:4
butler	Gen. 40:1–23
carpenter	2 Kgs. 12:11; Isa. 41:7
chamberlain	manager of a household; 2 Kgs. 23:11; Esther 1:10
cook	1 Sam. 8:13; 9:22–24
coppersmith	Ex. 26:11, 37
counselor	1 Chr. 27:32; Ezra 4:5
craftsman	2 Kgs. 24:14, 16
creditor	Isa. 50:1
cupbearer	Gen. 40:1–23; 1 Kgs. 10:5
designer	Ex. 35:35; 38:23
doorkeeper	Ps. 84:10
embroiderer	Judg. 5:30; Ezek. 27:7
farmer	Gen. 4:2–8
feller	one who cuts down trees; Isa. 14:8
fisherman	Isa. 19:5–8

Occupation	Scripture
footman	courier; Jer. 12:5
fowler	hunter; Prov. 1:17; Hosea 7:12
fuller	person who cleans and thickens cloth; 2 Kgs. 18:17
gatekeeper	2 Kgs. 11:4–9
goldsmith	Isa. 40:19; 41:7
government official	Gen. 41:34; Ex. 5:6–8; Num. 11:16; 1 Kgs. 4:5
handmaid	Lev. 25:6; Deut. 5:14
harvestman	Isa. 17:5
herald	Dan. 3:4
hireling	laborer, often of menial work; Isa. 16:14; 21:16
interpreter	Gen. 42:23
ironsmith	Gen. 4:22; Isa. 44:12
jeweler	Gen. 24:22, 30; Ezek. 23:26
judge	Ex. 18:13–26
laborer	Ps. 90:10
lender	Isa. 24:2
linen worker	1 Chr. 4:21
maidservant	Gen. 16:1; 1 Sam. 1:11
merchant	Isa. 23:2, 8
midwife	Gen. 35:17; 38:28
mourner	Jer. 9:17; Amos 5:16
musician	1 Chr. 25:1–7
nurse	2 Sam. 4:4; 11:2
overseer	supervisor; 2 Chr. 2:8; Neh. 11:9

Occupation	Scripture
perfumer	producer or seller of perfume; 1 Sam. 8:13; Neh. 3:8
physician	Gen. 50:2; Jer. 8:22
plasterer	Lev. 14:42–43; Deut. 27:2–4
plowman	Isa. 28:24; 61:5
potter	Isa. 29:16; 30:14
prognosticator	foreteller of future events; Isa. 47:13
recorder	2 Sam. 8:16; 20:24
ruler	2 Chr. 7:18
sailor	1 Kgs. 9:26, 28
scribe	2 Kgs. 18:18; Ezra 7:6, 11
shearer	Isa. 53:7
shepherd	Isa. 13:20; 31:4
shipbuilder	1 Kgs. 9:26–27
silversmith	Judg. 17:4
singer	1 Chr. 15:16, 19, 27
smith	Isa. 44:12; 54:16
soldier	Ex. 14:9; Deut. 11:4
sower	Isa. 55:10
steward	Isa. 22:15
stone mason	2 Sam. 5:11; 1 Kgs. 5:17–18
tanner	Ex. 25:5; 26:14
teacher	Isa. 30:20; 43:27
trafficker	trader; Isa. 23:8
treader	wine; Isa. 16:10

Occupation	Scripture
treasurer	1 Chr. 27:25; 29:7-8
vinedresser	Isa. 61:5
watchman	2 Sam. 18:24
water carrier	Gen. 24:13; 1 Sam. 9:11; Ruth 2:9
weaver	Prov. 31:13, 19
woodworker	1 Kgs. 6:15-39
workman	Isa. 40:19, 20