

## WHAT WAS JESUS' OCCUPATION?

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### I. TERMINOLOGY

Is not this the τέκτων?—Mark 6:3

Is not this the τέκτων's son?—Matthew 13:55

These two passages are the only NT witnesses to the occupation of Jesus (and Joseph). In both cases Jesus and his earthly father are described by the Greek word τέκτων. But while English (and other European-language) Bible translations have invariably—since the sixteenth century—rendered τέκτων as “carpenter,” there has been a degree of lexical imprecision concerning the correct translation, as can be observed from the following citations.

Thayer:<sup>1</sup> “A worker in wood, a carpenter.”

Liddell and Scott:<sup>2</sup> “Any worker in wood, esp. a carpenter, joiner, builder . . . generally any craftsman, worker, builder.”

BAG:<sup>3</sup> “carpenter, woodworker, builder.”

NIDNTT:<sup>4</sup> “Craftsman or builder in wood, stone or metal.”

L & N:<sup>5</sup> “one who uses various materials (wood, stone metal) in building—builder, carpenter.”

EDNT:<sup>6</sup> “one who makes, produces.”

The tendency lexically is to suggest that τέκτων has a somewhat variable reference within the framework of trades that have to do with stone, wood, and metal. The earlier lexical works, heavily weighted towards classical Greek sources, emphasized the trade of carpentry.<sup>7</sup> The more recent, linguistically

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<sup>1</sup> J. H. Thayer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (New York: American Book Co., 1886) 618.

<sup>2</sup> H. G. Liddell and R. Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: The University Press, 1861) 1447.

<sup>3</sup> W. F. Arndt and F. W. Gingrich, eds., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (2d ed.; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957) 816.

<sup>4</sup> NIDNTT 1.279: “ἀρχιτέκτων means a head builder, master builder, contractor or director of works; τεχνίτης means a craftsman, artisan or designer; and τέχνη means an art, craft, trade, or professional skill.”

<sup>5</sup> J. P. Louw and E. A. Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains* (2d ed.; New York: United Bible Societies, 1989) 1.520.

<sup>6</sup> EDNT 3.342. “One can assume that Jesus and his father Joseph were *building workmen/carpenters*” (ibid.).

<sup>7</sup> The list of exegetical works above is arranged by date of publication (in English). Liddell and Scott's *Lexicon* first appeared in 1843; that of Thayer in 1886; BAGD in 1957; NIDNTT in 1978; Louw and Nida in 1988; and EDNT in 1990.

improved lexical publications focus mainly on “craftsman” or “builder” as the preferred translation. For example, J. I. Packer writes in *NIDNTT* concerning Matt 13:55 and Mark 6:3 that “τέκτων could equally mean ‘mason’ or ‘smith’ (as indeed some of the fathers took it); or it could mean that Joseph and Jesus were builders, so that carpentry and masonry would have been among their skills.”<sup>8</sup> The current editions of BAGD and Liddell, Scott, and Jones give improved renderings, de-emphasising “carpenter,” e.g. “one who constructs, builder, carpenter.”

In an earlier study of the term τέκτων, C. C. McCown concluded that “classical and Hellenistic literature as well as the papyri offer abundant evidence to prove that τέκτων was almost universally reserved for the worker in wood and was only very rarely applied to artisans who used other materials.”<sup>9</sup> But trawling through the usages of Homer, Plato, and other classical writers of ancient eras does little to enable the modern reader to understand the sense of the term as it was employed in a specific historical and cultural context centuries later. The methodology employed here will be to first study the instances of τέκτων in secular Greek in the century before and after the NT occurrences, then to consider the writings of the first-century authors Josephus and Philo. Attention will also be given to the OT as the formative literature on the thinking of Jesus and the disciples, and then to other Second Temple Jewish writings. Finally, we will consider some early non-canonical Christian literature. Thus we will arrive at the word sense of the immediate linguistic context to the statements of the Gospel authors cited above.

First, we explore the range of the term in secular Greek in the first centuries BC and AD. In all but two cases the Loeb translation is offered after the word, which will serve to underline the variability and subjectivity of the choices made by the respective translators.

# 1. *Greek writers.*

## a. *Apollodorus.*<sup>10</sup>

We should, therefore, choose the calling appropriate to ourselves . . . and not prove that Hesiod spoke inexactly when he said “Potter is angry with potter, τέκτονι τέκτων (joiner with joiner)” (*De tranquillitate animi* 473.A.11).

<sup>8</sup> *NIDNTT* 1.279.

<sup>9</sup> C. C. McCown, “Ο Τέκτων,” in *Studies in Early Christianity* (ed. S. J. Case; New York: The Century Co., 1928) 176. McCown did recognize that “[t]he Hebrew word *Harash* appears never to have become specialized and was always used for ‘artisan’ in general, the context or the defining modifier being necessary to determine its meaning” (p. 174). A similar view is argued by Paul H. Furfey in “Christ as τέκτων,” *CBQ* 17 (1955) 324–55. Furfey goes farther in arguing that “it is quite likely that he devoted the greater part of his time to other types of woodworking, the fabrication of furniture and other wooden objects” (p. 205). Like McCown, Furfey bases his conclusions on the classical Greek sources, other contemporary languages, and some of the Church fathers. Notably absent from both treatments are the Jewish sources and the Jewish context.

<sup>10</sup> Apollodorus, *Bibliotheca*.

A τέκτων (carpenter) likewise in making a tiller would be more pleased if he knew that it would steer the flagship of Themistocles fighting in defense of Hellas (*Maxime cum principibus philosopho esse deserendum* 779.A.6).

An ἀρχιτέκτων chooses subordinates and χειροτέχνας (handicraftsmen) who will not spoil his work but will co-operate to perfect it (*Praecepta gerendae reipublicae* 807.C.3).

Daedalus, an ἀρχιτέκτων . . . constructed a wooden cow on wheels (3.10.1).

Daedalus . . . was an excellent ἀρχιτέκτων and the first inventor of images (3.15.8).

b. *Dio Chrysostom.*<sup>11</sup>

If he is a dyer or a cobbler or a τέκτων (craftsman), it is unbecoming to make these occupations a reproach (34.23.11).

Both potter at potter doth rage, and τέκτονι τέκτων (joiner at joiner) (77/78.1.8).

The physician . . . has a profession not inferior to that of the τεκτόνων (joiners) (77/78.87.2).

They would recognize that it is not right nor for their own good for a τέκτων to be jealous or angry because of his craft (τέχνην), whether it was blacksmith against blacksmith or τέκτονι τέκτων (joiner against joiner) (77/78.13.7).

Someone affected by riches and fame "goes about as neither farmer nor trader nor soldier nor general, nor as shoemaker or τέκτων (builder) or physician or orator" (80.1.5).

c. *Diodorus Siculus.*<sup>12</sup>

Ἀρχιτέκτων is used by this writer twice in a figurative sense, i.e. "schemer" (16.61.2.1; 29.25.1.10).

d. *Lexicon Homericum.*<sup>13</sup>

This work contains a vocabulary list that mentions τέκτων.

e. *Epictetus.*<sup>14</sup>

The τέκτων (carpenter/builder) becomes a τέκτων first by learning something, the helmsman becomes a helmsman by first learning something (2.14.10.1).

When I see a τέκτων (craftsman) who has material lying ready to hand, I look for the finished product. Here also, then, is the τέκτων, and here is the material; what do we yet lack? (2.19.31.3).

The τέκτων (builder) does not come forward and say, "Listen to me deliver a discourse about the art of building" (τεκτονικῶν); but he takes a contract for a house, builds it, and thereby proves that he possesses the art (3.21.4.1).

<sup>11</sup> Dio Chrysostom, *Orationes*.

<sup>12</sup> Diodorus Siculus, *Bibliotheca Historica*.

<sup>13</sup> *Lexicon Homericum* 150, 31.

<sup>14</sup> Epictetus, *Dissertationes ab Arriano Digestae*.

You will find the same thing in the arts. If you want to be a τέκτων (carpenter), you will have such and such exercises; if a blacksmith, such and such other (3.23.3.1).

The citharoede is to act as a citharoede, the τέκτων (craftsman) as a τέκτων, the philosopher as a philosopher, the rhetor as a rhetor (3.23.5.3).

Now can anyone do good to others unless he has received good himself? No more than the non-τέκτων (builder/carpenter) can help others in building/carpentry (τεκτονικήν), or the non-cobbler in cobbling (3.23.8.3).

"This man is a τέκτων" (builder/carpenter). Why? "He uses an adze" (4.8.4.2).

When someone sees a fellow hewing clumsily with an axe, he does not say "What's the use of τεκτονικῆς? See the bad work τέκτορες (carpenters) do," but quite the contrary, he says, "This fellow is no τέκτων, for he hews clumsily with the axe" (4.8.7.4).

Does the inattentive τέκτων (craftsman) do his work more accurately? The inattentive helmsman more safely? (4.12.5.2).

#### f. *Plutarch.*

And so an ἀρχιτέκτων (smith) would regard his task as the welding of iron or the tempering of an axe rather than any one of the things that have to be done for this purpose, such as blowing up the fire, or getting ready a flux (*Septem sapientium convivium* 156.B.11).

Poemander . . . fortified Poemandria. Plycritus the ἀρχιτέκτων, however, who was present, spoke slightly of the fortifications (*Aetia Romana et Graeca* 299.C.10).

Among the other τεχνίταις (artists) at his court was Stasicrates the ἀρχιτέκτων (master-sculptor), not seeking to make something flowery or pleasant or lifelike to look upon, but employing a magnificence in workmanship and design worthy of a king's munificence (*De Alexandri magni fortuna aut virtute* 355.C.3).

To hear Euripides quoted to boot, "A τέκτων (joiner) thou yet didst a task essay that was no ξυλουργικά" (carpentry) (*Praecepta gerendae Republicae* 812.E.9).

Homer was not only admirable in other ways, but also a very wise ἀρχιτέκτων, and ordered the plan of the city to be drawn in conformity with this site (*Alexander* 26.4.6).

#### g. *Rufus Ephesus Med.*<sup>15</sup>

In the same way it certainly does not begin to teach the other skills, also the brass-worker, the leather-worker, the τέκτων . . . (*De corporis humani appellationibus*).

Leaving aside the two figurative occurrences (schemer), it is evident that to the various translators of the Greek texts cited above the precise mean-

<sup>15</sup> Rufus Ephesus Med., "De corporis humani appellationibus," *Oeuvres de Rufus d'Ephèse* (ed. C. Daremberg and C. E. Ruelle; Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1879 [reprint: Amsterdam: Hakkert, 1963]) 3.

ing of τέκτων is sometimes less than totally clear from the context. In some instances, it seemed best to render it as (a) builder; (b) carpenter; (c) smith; (d) sculptor; (e) joiner. Four times τέκτων is contrasted with (a) smith; (b) potter; (c) cobbler. Five times the term ἀρχιτέκτων is employed, meaning master builder or architect, and even master-sculptor. In the case of the other eight instances, it was considered wisest to render τέκτων in such general terms as builder, craftsman, or artisan.

2. *Philo*. Now we turn to the Jewish philosopher Philo. Though Jewish, Philo of Alexandria inhabited a mental world of Hellenistic philosophy and cultural values, so it is not surprising to find him employing the word τέκτων in ways similar to the secular Greek writers. He does so three times.

"The τέκτονα (carpenter) and the painter and the husbandman and the musician and those who practice other arts (τέχνας) . . . the τεκτονικός (carpenter) takes and carves a piece of timber . . . we speak not only of carpenters, but of practicing carpentry (τέκτονι τὸ τεκτονεῖν)" (Sobr. 35.36).

"Some of the arts . . . are practical, but not theoretical, as the arts of the τεκτονικῇ, χαλκευτικῇ (carpenter and coppersmith)" (Leg. 57).

These instances could be rendered as craftsman, but carpenter would suit the contexts better.

3. *Josephus*. Turning now to Flavius Josephus, he employs τέκτων four times in the *War*, and seven times in the *Antiquities*. There is an interesting difference between the two works in regard to the usage of this word. First, the *Antiquities*.

Moses, after recompensing with fitting bounties the τέκτονας (craftsmen) who had executed works so excellent, sacrificed . . . (3.204).

They (rulers) will make of them τεχνίτας (craftsmen), makers of armour, of chariots and of instruments . . . (6.40).

Gifts of cedar wood and skilled men as τέκτονας καὶ οἰκοδόμους (carpenters and builders) to construct a palace in Jerusalem (7.66).

You also have many tens of thousands of μυριάδας καὶ τεκτόνων (stone cutters and carpenters) (7.340).

He had already secured many talents of gold and more of silver, and wood and a host of τεκτόνων πλῆθος καὶ λατόμων (carpenters and stone cutters) as well as emeralds and precious stones (7.377).

They also began the building of the temple, giving large sums of money to the λατόμοις καὶ τέκτοσι (stone cutters and carpenters) (11.78).

. . . trained some as οἰκοδόμους (builders), others as τέκτονας (carpenters) (15.390).

All of these occurrences of the word have to do with the tabernacle or the temple or the palace, and plainly Josephus in his reading of the Hebrew text understands τέκτων in these contexts to refer usually to workers in wood. In the *War*, however, where Josephus writes concerning events contemporary

to himself, the referent is different. Describing the fortification of the camps of the Roman armies prior to battle, he portrays the leveling of the ground and the measurement of a square:

For this purpose the army is accompanied by τεκτόνων πλῆθος (a multitude of workmen) and of tools for building (3.78).

Josephus . . . summoned τέκτονας (masons) and directed them to increase the height of the wall (3.171).

Under this screen the τεκτόνων (builders) raised the wall to a height of twenty cubits (3.173).

The works being completed, the τέκτονας (engineers) measured the distance to the wall with lead and line (5.275).

All of these references are to the work of builders. Wood is not involved,<sup>16</sup> but earth and stones. So in his commentary on the biblical story, Josephus employs τέκτων to portray primarily the craft of carpentry, but in his contemporary references, about which he had first-hand knowledge, he understands the term to apply to the work of building or construction.

4. *Qumran*. Inhabiting a geographical and cultural world more strictly Jewish than that of Josephus, the Essenes lived (according to Josephus) in many places in Judea, but the prime record of their habitation lies twenty miles east of Jerusalem on the shores of the Dead Sea. The writings of the Essenes contain few references to the Hebrew equivalent of the term τέκτων, i.e. *ḥārāš*, in the material that is legible.<sup>17</sup> Only five clear instances of *ḥārāš* are employed, with the usual OT meaning of "craftsman." They are found in the War Scroll in contexts that deal with the material preparations for the coming conflict between the sons of light and the sons of darkness.

. . . and precious stones, many colored ornaments, the work of a skillful *ḥārāš* (craftsman) (4Q491 5:6, 9, 10, 11).

This phrase is repeated four times; each of the instances concerns the fashioning of swords, spears, and shields.

. . . and the *ḥārāšim* (smiths), and the smelters, and those enlisted to be . . . for their divisions" (4Q491 1-3, 7).

In sum, the Hebrew word *ḥārāš* was rarely employed by the Essenes and refers to the craft of the smith, not the carpenter.

One thing that Philo, Josephus, the Essenes, and the Gospel writers had in common—and which set them apart from the secular Greek writers exam-

<sup>16</sup> Except perhaps in 3.173: the term δρύφακτον (fence, railing) may refer to wood.

<sup>17</sup> There are two references to the use of the word to mean "sorcery" (4Q201 3:15; 4Q202 2:19); four instances where the sense is "silence" or "dumb" (11Q19 T<sup>a</sup> 52:13; 53:18; CD 9:6; Mas1h Sir 3:25; 1Q28a 2:6); and one of the verb meaning "to plow" (11Q19 53:13). There are also a few instances of the word in which the context is indecipherable.

ined above—was their devotion to and their knowledge of the Scriptures of the OT. It is necessary, therefore, to review the Hebrew term that these Jewish writers (who *thought* in Aramaic/Hebrew first) translated as τέκτων. That term is *ḥārāš*.

5. *The Old Testament.* In the Hebrew Bible the verb *ḥārāš* occurs 26 times and means “to cut into, inscribe, to fabricate, out of metal . . . wood, stone, with an acc. of the material.”<sup>18</sup> Another lexicon says, “to engrave, plough, devise. The basic idea is cutting into some material, e.g. engraving metal or ploughing soil.”<sup>19</sup> The generality of application is due to the fact that similar tools were employed to work different materials, most of which were designed to cut or carve something.

The noun *ḥārāš* occurs 35 times and means “craftsman; on stone, on wood; metal worker (smith), armourer; workers of wood and stone; of wood and metal.”<sup>20</sup> Again, another lexicon gives this rendering: “Engraver, artificer (a) in metal (b) in wood (c) in stone (d) general.”<sup>21</sup> *NIDOTTE* gives “craftsman, artisan,” while Cline has “artisan . . . worker in stone . . . in wood . . . in metal.”<sup>22</sup>

These conclusions are based on the following passages.

First, uncertainties arise in several passages where *ḥārāš* is set alongside or distinguished from a related term. For example, we find *ḥārāš* distinguished from (a) builders, masons, stone cutters in 2 Kgs 12:11, 12; 22:6; (b) smiths in 2 Kgs 24:14, 16; Isa 40:19; 41:7; Jer 24:1; 29:2; 2 Chr 34:11; (c) masons in 2 Sam 5:11; 1 Chr 14:1; 22:15; 2 Chr 24:12; Ezra 3:7; (d) woodsman in 1 Chr 22:14 (*ḥārāš eben wā'ēš*); (e) weavers and designers in Exod 38:23. While this fluidity can be confusing to the reader, the biblical authors evidently intend to distinguish between various kinds of craftsmen and assume that the context sufficiently defines the particular trade or skill in that specific situation. In temple contexts it appears that workers in wood were most frequently intended.

Second, there are texts in which the meaning is clearly smiths or metalworkers, often in the context of fashioning idols: Deut 27:15; 1 Sam 13:19; Isa 40:19; 44:11–12; 45:16; 54:16; Jer 10:9; Hos 8:6; 13:2; 1 Chr 29:5. Then in the following contexts, which are concerned with the tabernacle and the priestly garments, *ḥārāš* means engravers of precious stones: Exod 28:11;

<sup>18</sup> E. Kautzsch, ed., *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar* (trans. A. E. Cowley; 2d ed.; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1910) 309.

<sup>19</sup> *TWOT* 1.327. See also *TDOT* 5.220–23.

<sup>20</sup> KB 1.358.

<sup>21</sup> BDB 360. See *TWOT* 1.328: “Engraver, carpenter, smith, mason . . . The Ugaritic name means craftsman.” Also Gesenius: “(1) An engraver of stones (2) an artificer, of iron, brass, stone, wood (a smith, mason or carpenter)” (p. 309). On the Ugaritic, see S. E. Lowenstamm: “The Hebrew Root *ḥārāš* in Light of the Ugaritic Texts,” *JJS* 10 (1959) 63–65.

<sup>22</sup> *NIDOTTE* 2.298. See also David J. A. Clines, ed., *Dictionary of Classical Hebrew* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993) 3.324.

35:35. In one passage only should the translation undoubtedly read carpenters or workers in wood: Jer 10:3. At least one example requires the general sense of craftsman: 1 Chr 4:14.

In the above group of passages, where the intended meaning is clear from the contexts, it is evident that the usual referent is not to carpenters, but to those who cut or engrave in stone or metal. Most of the passages not having to do with idolatry appear in contexts that portray the building of the tabernacle or the temple, as we might expect. The reader, in short, must deduce from the literary context which trade is referred to by the general term *hārāš* unless a defining modifier is given, which sometimes is the case. For example, the phrase *hārāš ētzim* ("carpenter") is employed in 2 Sam 5:11; 2 Kgs 12:11,12; 1 Chr 14:1; 22:15; Isa 44:13. The phrase *hārāš eben* ("mason") appears also in Exod 28:11; 2 Sam 5:11; 1 Chr 22:15. We also encounter in the OT *hārāš barzel* ("smith"), *hārāš neḥōsheth* ("copper-smith"), *hārāš qīr* ("builders of walls"), *hārāš širīm* ("idol-maker"). Translation would be simpler if such modifiers were employed in all OT instances of the word *hārāš*, but unfortunately the biblical writers were often content to use the general term. It is, however, notable that the term for "carpenter" (*naggar*), which occurs in the Mishnah and Talmud, is not found in the OT.

To summarize: the ancient Hebrews were apparently content to employ the general term *hārāš* ("craftsman," "builder," "artisan") for a variety of skills or trades which involved cutting or carving, and to render specificity at times by means of a modifier or a more or less clear contextual reference.<sup>23</sup> This implies that the Israelite *hārāš* did not limit himself to working with only one material. He could move from stone to metal to wood as the need or opportunity arose (Neh 3:8, 31), and while he could probably specialize in one material if that was advantageous, he did not normally restrict himself in this way, as many modern tradesmen do.<sup>24</sup>

Indeed, this is more or less the job description of the first master craftsman/builder, Bezalel:

The Lord has called by name Bezalel . . . and he has filled him with the Spirit of God, in wisdom, in understanding and in knowledge, and in all craftsmanship; to make designs for working in gold and in silver and in bronze, and in the cutting of stones for settings and in the carving of wood . . . (Exod 35:30-33).

6. *The Septuagint.* The most common translation of *hārāš* in the LXX is τέκτων (22 times).<sup>25</sup> In addition, τεχνίτης is employed 6 times, τέχνη once, ἀρχιτέκτων twice, and χαλκεύς once. Basically, it functions in the same manner as the Hebrew term, sometimes being used in the general sense of "craftsman" (MT 24, LXX 19) and sometimes with a defining modifier, e.g.

<sup>23</sup> There are few references to tools in the OT (but see 1 Kgs 6:7: "Hammers, chisel, or iron tool"; and Isa 44:13: "rule, chalk, plane, compass").

<sup>24</sup> Although in modern commercial construction, workers who fit panels of various materials such as plastic, even concrete, are still referred to at times as "carpenters," because of the transferability of the skills required.

<sup>25</sup> Other renderings are ἀροτριον ("plow") 12 times; θερίειν ("reap") twice; λειτουργός twice.



ξύλων, λίθων, χαλκοῦς, συγκλείοντα, χρυσοχόος, σίδηρον, δεσμώτας, λατόμοις (MT 9, LXX 12). In one instance, *hārāš* is rendered by a descriptive phrase (Exod 35:35); in another instance, the LXX is a mistranslation ("deaf" Isa 44:11), and in three cases the LXX translators added a specifier which is justified by the context (1 Sam 13:19; Isa 54:16; 1 Chr 14:1). As with the Hebrew *hārāš*, the LXX occurrences of τέκτων and τεχνίτης appear in two main contexts: the tabernacle/temple/palace narratives (nine without a specifier, seven with), and in connection with idol manufacture (thirteen without, five with a specifier). There are two other occurrences which appear in relation to (a) weaponry: τέκτων σίδηρου renders *hārāš*; (b) genealogy: in Isa 54:16 *hārāš* is rendered as χαλκεύς (smith). Twice the Greek word οἰκοδόμος is used to translate *hārāš* (1 Chr 14:1; 22:15).

It would appear that the LXX translators were fairly consistent, but not rigidly so, in translating the MT. In fact, in the OT the only contexts in which a modifier is added to the general terms *hārāš*/τέκτων, apart from two prophetic texts, are those that describe the monumental construction projects of the tabernacle, temple, and palace. *Only there was there need for specialization in construction.* Otherwise, craftsmen employed their cutting/carving skills on any relevant material: stone, wood, metals. It is the general term τέκτων that the Gospel writers employed—*without the modifier*—to define the occupation of Joseph and Jesus.

**7. Jewish apocrypha.** In this variegated body of literature that was in circulation between 200 BC and AD 100, there are only six instances of τέκτων (apart from three occurrences which are figurative in meaning: devise, scheme).<sup>26</sup> All appear in contexts that deal with either the making of idols or the construction of the temple.

They gave money to the masons and carpenters (1 Esdr 5:54).

to the masons and carpenters (τοῖς λατόμοις καὶ τοῖς τέκτοσιν) (2 Esdr 3:7).

Concerning idols: their tongue is polished by the τέκτων, and they themselves are overlaid with gold and silver (Ep Jer 8).

they are fashioned by carpenters and goldsmiths: they can be nothing else than the workmen will have them to be (Ep Jer 45).

In the famous section titled "The superiority of the scribe over the laborer and artisan" (Sir 38:24–30), the author's point is not really to denigrate labor as such (as is the case in the Egyptian precursor "The Satire on the Trades")<sup>27</sup> but to portray the work of the scribe as vastly superior. The writer mentions engravers, metalworkers, and potters. In verse 27 he states:

So it is with every artisan and master artisan (τέκτων καὶ ἀρχιτέκτων).

This is the NRSV translation. It is interesting to note the variety of other translations of this phrase: "engravers and designers" (NAB); "carpenters

<sup>26</sup> Sir 11:33; 27:22; Bar 3:18.

<sup>27</sup> See P. W. Skehan and A. A. Delella, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira* (New York: Doubleday, 1987).

and workmasters" (KJV); "craftsmen and workmasters" (Douay); "workmen and craftsmen" (NJB). The uncertainty of the translators well illustrates the fluidity and variability of the original Greek (and Hebrew).

8. *Pseudepigrapha*. There is one important instance in the *Pseudepigrapha*.<sup>28</sup> In *Sib. Or.* 5.543 we read,

Nor did wise workmen (τέκτων) make a stone by them.

This is not carpentry, but masonry.

9. *Mishnah and Midrash*. There is little consistency in the rabbinic sources in the first centuries after Christ. Since the talmudic material is so late, this review is restricted to the *Mishnah* and *Midrash*.

a. *The Midrash*.<sup>29</sup> Twice *bānā* is employed:

A builder requires six things (to build a house): water, earth, timber, stones, canes, and iron (*Gen. R.* 1:8).

In human affairs, an earthly monarch builds a palace and roofs it over with stones, timber, and earth (*Gen. R.* 4:1).

"Architect" is employed once:

This may be compared to a master builder who built (*architektōs shēbānā*) a country with secret chambers, canals and caves (*Gen. R.* 24:1).

Twice the term *naggār* renders "carpenter":

R Hoshaya said: Anyone who has knowledge and lacks the fear of sin, really has nothing, just as a carpenter who has no tools with him is not a real carpenter (*Exod. R.* 40:1).

Finally, we find that a term scarcely employed in the OT now is used to describe the craftsman:

No-one loves his fellow-craftsman . . . the Holy One, blessed be He, also loves His fellow-craftsmen (i.e. the righteous) (*Gen. R.* 27:2).

b. *The Mishnah*. In the *Mishnah*, the same term<sup>30</sup>—*ʾūmān*—appears four times.

*Qid.* 4:14: "a man should not teach his son a craft that is practiced among women. R Meir says: a man should always teach his son a cleanly craft . . .

*B. Qam.* 9:3: If he gave aught to craftsmen (*lēʾūmānīn*) to be mended, and they spoiled it, they must make restitution. If he gave a carpenter (*lēḥārāš*) a box, chest, or cupboard to be mended, and he spoiled it, he must make restitution. If a builder (*wēḥabbannāʾi*) undertook to pull down a wall . . . etc.

<sup>28</sup> Another instance is found in *Pseudo-Euripides* from a much later date: "What sort of house fashioned by craftsmen (τεκτόνων) would contain the divine form in the folds of its walls?"

<sup>29</sup> Quotations are from H. Freeman, ed., *Midrash Rabba* (10 vols.; London: The Soncino Press, 1983).

<sup>30</sup> *Ommān* does occur once in the OT: Song 7:2.

*Arak*. 6:3: if he was a craftsman (*'ûmān*) they must leave him two of any kind of the tools of his craft. If he was a carpenter (*ḥārāš*) they must leave him two axes and two saws.

*Ḥārāš* is the favorite word for carpenter. In *Kel.* 29:3 it is contrasted with builder:

The cord . . . of a carpenter's (*ḥārāšīn*) plummet, up to eighteen; that of a builder's (*binyan*) plummet, up to fifty cubits.

Similarly, in *Kel.* 14:3:

A builder's (*banai*) crowbar and a carpenter's (*ḥārāš*) pick are susceptible to uncleanness . . . a blacksmith's (*nappāḥīn*) jack is susceptible . . .

In summary, while the most popular word for carpenter is now *ḥārāš*, a new term is also used: *naggār*. The general term "craftsman" is most frequently rendered by another word: *'ûmān*. These developments in usage that took place in the two centuries after the fall of the temple continued in the Talmudic period, but that is beyond the scope of this enquiry.<sup>31</sup>

10. *New Testament apocrypha*. Few NT apocryphal books were written before the end of the second century. One that was important in the promotion of mariolatry in the early church is the *Protevangelium of James*. This first infancy narrative of Jesus is a glorification of Mary before and after the birth of Jesus and of her alleged perpetual virginity.<sup>32</sup> There are two passages germane to our study in this short work. In the first, Joseph speaks to Mary as follows:

Now I leave you in my house and go away to build my buildings (οἰκοδομείσαι τὰς οἰκοδόμας) (9:3).

The second also concerns Joseph:

when she was in her sixth month, behold, Joseph came from his building (ἔπο τῶν οἰκοδόμων αὐτοῦ) (13:1).

In some of the later (usually Gnostic) apocryphal writings, Joseph and Jesus are portrayed as carpenters who carved wooden ornaments. For example, the *Infancy Story of Thomas*, one of the earliest of the Gnostic works, probably composed only slightly after the *Protevangelium of James*, states: "His father was a carpenter, and made at that time plows and yokes."<sup>33</sup> To the

<sup>31</sup> Jastrow defines *ḥārāš* as "artist, artisan, carpenter" (Marcus Jastrow, *A Dictionary of the Targumim, The Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature* [New York: Pardes, 1950] 1.507); *aman* as "skilled artist, artisan, professional cook, architect, etc."; *naggār* as "carpenter, turner, in gen., artisan." The Syriac *amno* is translated as "a craft, trade, or profession" and *najjar* as "a workman, esp., a carpenter" (J. Payne Smith, *A Compendious Syriac Dictionary* [Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1999] 20, 328). The Arabic versions take over *najjar*, meaning carpenter, but in Syriac the primary meaning is still "workman" or "craftsman."

<sup>32</sup> On the text of the *Protevangelium* see H. R. Smid, *Protevangelium Jacobi* (Assen: Van Gorcum and Comp. N. V., 1965); E. De Strycker, *Protévangile de Jacques* (Brussels: Société des Bollandistes, 1961).

<sup>33</sup> *Infancy Story of Thomas* 13:1. See the discussion of the dating problem in Wilhelm Schneemelcher, *New Testament Apocrypha* (rev. ed.; Cambridge: James Clarke and Co., 1991) 1.439–43.

writer of the *Protevangelium*, however, Joseph was a contractor who worked on his own buildings. The *Protevangelium* was in circulation after AD 150<sup>34</sup> and is therefore probably of greater value in the early history of the church and its knowledge of Jesus than any other non-canonical work.

11. *Conclusion.* At the end of this review of the lexical evidence concerning the occupation of Jesus, some conclusions may be drawn.

First, it is evident that the word does not mean "carpenter" as that word is understood today. In the context of first-century Israel, the τέκτων was a general craftsman who worked with stone, wood, and sometimes metal in large and small building projects.

Second, when the ancient writers wished to designate a specific construction activity, they tended to do so by adding a modifier to the general term "craftsman," such as worker "in stone," "in metal," "in wood." Neither Mark nor Matthew designate a specialization for Jesus, so we should not import into the text from church tradition any such specialization.

Third, the frequency of occurrence of the specific terms depends to a considerable extent on the material culture of the local environment, that is, Greek literary sources tend to employ a higher frequency of references to wooden material, and Hebrew sources tend to emphasize work with stone more than wood. References to wood construction in Hebrew literature tend to be aligned with the building of the tabernacle and the temple and the palace, or with the making of idols. Otherwise, the majority of references are to stone construction. The reasons for this are apparent when one studies the material culture of Palestine in the time of Jesus.

Finally, it is reasonable to conclude that the linguistic evidence strongly suggests that Jesus (and Joseph before him) was a builder. The word "builder" is to be preferred to the words "craftsman" or "artisan" because (a) the latter have too wide a range of meaning (they include tanners, weavers, potters, tent-makers, etc); (b) the other terms can today be confused with "artsy-craftsy" activities, that is, crafts as a hobby rather than hard daily manual labor.

In confirmation of this view, we will now turn to the words of Jesus himself as recorded in the Gospels. If Jesus was a carpenter, it is reasonable to expect that he would frequently make reference to this occupation. If a builder, it might be expected that he would show some indication of this.

## II. VOCABULARY OF JESUS

The most notable thing about the public speech of Jesus is generally considered to be his use of parables, and the most remarkable feature of his parabolic teaching is his observation of "everyday life in Palestine." But we

<sup>34</sup> Schneemelcher, *Apocrypha*, dates it at after AD 150. Much later, *Pseudo-Matthew* describes Joseph as a carpenter and states: "Joseph was occupied with his work, house-building, for he was a carpenter" (10:1-2).

must repudiate the romantic notion that Jesus spent his time sitting on the hillsides watching the daily activities of his contemporary citizens (often patronized today as mere "peasants"), and taking mental notes of his observations so that he could later use them as sermon illustrations. Rather, Jesus' employment of stories and metaphors was based on (a) his intimate knowledge of the Scriptures; and (b) his own hard-won experience growing up on a terraced farm in Nazareth, participating in the cyclical life of the village, going to work every day, attending the synagogue, and interacting with his family, clan, neighbors, and strangers.

During most of the twentieth century, the majority of scholarly analysis of the parables and the teaching of Jesus generally focused on the literary forms, not the substance of the Gospels material. Under the influence of form and redaction-critical theories, much effort has been expended in attempting to separate the "original" teaching of Jesus from the later alleged concerns of the Church. Not surprisingly, little consensus on this rather subjective enterprise has been achieved. In what follows we use a different approach. We are not concerned with the rhetorical and theological uses Jesus made of the imagery he employed, but with the vocabulary and imagery itself.<sup>35</sup>

What is indisputable about Jesus' early life is that (a) he interacted on a daily basis with family, clan, neighbors, and strangers, like everyone else in a Galilean village; (b) he grew up in the farming village of Nazareth in Galilee and therefore was involved to an extent daily with its agrarian environment; (c) he worked with his father at first, then probably with his family later as a τέκτων, and consequently knew firsthand the occupational and business experiences of a first-century craftsman. So the scope of the teaching and vocabulary of Jesus can be allocated to the spheres of (1) agrarian culture; (2) social interaction; (3) financial affairs; (4) occupation. These are the areas of Jesus' life which were intrinsic to his existence for thirty years and from which he consequently drew his vocabulary and descriptive references. We will survey them briefly in turn, beginning with the most familiar sphere of reference.

**1. Agrarian culture.** It is usually asserted that the most frequent allusions in Jesus' teaching are to farming activities. Since the great majority of the population of Galilee lived off the land, including the citizens of Nazareth, this is not entirely unexpected.

We find references to sowing and planting (Matt 13:3–23 pars.; 13:24–30; 13:31–32 pars.; Mark 4:26–29); to field workers (Matt 24:40; Luke 17:36); to plowing (Luke 17:7); to harvesting (Luke 10:2; John 4:35); to reaping (John 4:36); to grain sifting (Luke 2:31); to crop storage (Luke 12:6–20); and to the use of fertilizer (Luke 13:8; 14:35).

<sup>35</sup> Scholarly debates about whether the words recorded in the Gospels reflect the *ipssissima verba Jesu*, the *ipssissima vox Jesu*, the redaction of an unknown contemporary or a hypothetical community, continue and no doubt will not cease soon. That is beyond the scope of this enquiry, but in my opinion it requires considerable faith to deny that the above material originated with Jesus.

Several references appear concerning vineyards and wine (Matt 20:1–16; John 15:1–8; Matt 21:33–44; John 2:1–11). Frequent references to fruit-bearing trees are also evident (Matt 7:16–20; 12:33 fruit trees; Luke 17:6 mulberry; Matt 24:32–35 pars. fig trees). Jesus refers often to sheep and shepherding (Matt 9:16; 12:11–12; 18:12–14; 26:31; Mark 14:27; Luke 10:3; 12:32; 14:4–7; 17:7; John 10:1–18; 21:15–17). He also reveals a certain knowledge of fish (Matt 7:10; 12:20) and fishing (Matt 13:47–50; Luke 5:4–11; John 21:6). Jesus was familiar with some of the uses of salt in the economy (Matt 5:13; Mark 9:49–50; Luke 14:34–35).

Not surprisingly Jesus refers to the fauna of Galilee: (a) animals: oxen (Matt 11:29–30; Luke 13:15); foxes (Matt 8:20 par.; Luke 9:58; 13:32); wolves (Matt 9:16; Luke 10:3; John 10:12); dogs (Matt 15:26; Luke 16:21); snakes (Matt 10:16; 23:33); goats (Matt 25:32, 33); calves (Luke 15:23); donkeys (Luke 13:15); camels (Matt 23:24); gnats and moths (Matt 23:24; 6:19; Luke 12:33); snakes (Luke 10:19); maggots (Mark 9:48). Similarly, there are several references to the bird life of Galilee: (b) birds in general (Matt 8:20; Matt 13:4; Luke 12:6, 24); eagles (Luke 17:37); vultures (Matt 24:28; Luke 17:37); roosters (Matt 26:34; Luke 22:34) and hens (Luke 13:34); doves (Matt 10:16; Luke 2:24); sparrows (Matt 10:29); and crows (Luke 12:24).

Jesus at times indicates the local flora: grass and flowers (Luke 12:27–28); thistles (Matt 7:16); thorns (Matt 13:7); grapes (Matt 7:16); wheat (John 12:24). He also indicates his awareness of different soil types (Matt 13:3–8). Finally, Jesus shows an understanding of the climate, which everyone who works the land must possess (Matt 5:45; Luke 12:54–56; 17:24).

This is the conversational material that places Jesus in his first-century Palestinian agrarian context. In reality, there is little surprising about the knowledge that Jesus displays of his environment. Most of his contemporaries would have done the same.

In addition to the above, there is a range of domestic and farming terminology in the mouth of Jesus which is to be expected regardless of his occupation.

a. *farming*: plow (άρστρον): Luke 9:62; sickle (δρέπανον): Mark 4:29; winnowing fork (πνύον): Matt 3:12; yoke (ζυγός): Matt 11:29, 30; Luke 14:19; door/entrance (θύρα): Matt 6:6; 24:33; 25:10; Mark 13:29; Luke 11:7; 13:24, 25; John 10:1, 2, 7, 9; gate (πύλη): Matt 7:13, 14; 16:18; axe (ἀξίνη): Matt 3:10; walking stick (ράβδος): Mark 6:8; beam (δοκός): Matt 7:3; chains (πέδη): Mark 5:4.

b. *domestic*: table (τράπεζα): only in the context of wealthy homes and banking (Matt 15:27; 21:12; Luke 11:23; 16:21; 22:21, 30; John 2:1); chair (καθέδρα): in temple contexts only (Matt 21:12; 23:2; Mark 11:15); footstool (ὕποπόδιον: Matt 5:35); bronze vessel, basin (χαλκίον): Mark 7:4; lamp (λαμπάς, λύχνος): Matt 25:1; stand (λυχνία): Mark 4:21; bowl (σκευός): Matt 5:15; Luke 8:16; bed (κοίτη): Luke 11:7; cup (ποτήριον): Mark 9:41; vessel (ἄγγος): Matt 25:4; pitcher (ξέστης): Mark 7:4; jar (κεράμιον): Mark 14:13; plate

(παροψίς): Matt 23:25; dish (τρύβλιον): Matt 26:23; Mark 14:20; bucket/basket (μόδιος): Matt 5:15; needle (ῥαφίς, βελόνη): Matt 19:24; Luke 18:25.

2. *Social interaction.* We will deal first with Jesus' references to the home and then to the wider social context.

With regard to the social structure of the home, we discover Jesus referring to the father's care for his children (Matt 7:9–12; Luke 11:11–13). He reiterates the duty of children to their parents in Matt 15:4–6 pars.; 19:19. He alludes also to homes with servants (Matt 14:45–51). Jesus furthermore refers to the Israelite concept of hospitality to strangers (Matt 10:11–14; Luke 9:2–5) and to friendships (Matt 11:16; 20:13; Luke 14:10; 15:9, 29). Notable are his earnest concern for widows and his strong denunciations of those who took advantage of them (Matt 23:14 pars.; Mark 12:42, 43 par.; Luke 4:25, 26; 7:12; 18:3, 5). Even on the cross he made provision for the care of his mother (John 19:25–27).

Concerning the dwelling's physical structure, Jesus mentions the private room of the house (Matt 6:6; Luke 12:3), the guest/dining room of large homes (Matt 26:3; John 10:16), cellars (Luke 11:33), as well as the roof (Matt 10:27; 14:17). In addition, there is reference in his teaching to the objects found in small homes such as lamps and bowls which were made of clay, not wood, and beds which were reed mats (Matt 5:14–16; Mark 4:21; Luke 8:16; 11:33). Activities that he mentions include sweeping (Luke 14:8); cooking (Luke 12:1; 13:21; in John, Jesus also cooked! John 21:9–13); baking (Matt 13:33 pars.); washing utensils (Luke 11:39); lighting lamps (Matt 5:14–16 pars.); grinding grain (Matt 14:41); sewing (Matt 9:16); and filling wine bottles (Matt 9:17). All these features of the first-century Palestinian home were experienced by Jesus in his own home and in those that he visited (or worked on) before he undertook his public ministry.

Outside of the confines of the home, Jesus gives us considerable information about his social awareness and interaction. Mention is made in his teaching of pregnancy and childbirth (John 16:21) and of orphans (John 14:18). Matthew tells us that Jesus himself had brothers and sisters (Matt 12:46–50 pars.). A prominent feature of his teaching is the frequent use of weddings as a source of instruction (Matt 9:19–20; 22:1–14; 25:1–13; John 2:1–11). His teaching on marriage and divorce is well known (Matt 5:27–32; 19:3–12), as are his references to children and their intrinsic value (Matt 18:1–11; 19:13–15). He had obviously observed them at play (Matt 11:16–17; Luke 6:32). He was also familiar with the problem of difficult and rebellious children growing up (Matt 21:28–32; Luke 15:11–32). The latter parable of "the prodigal son" raises the matter of family honor, as does Jesus' reference to social rank in Luke 14:7–15. More than once Jesus makes mention of family and other social divisions (Matt 12:25–30 pars.). Sometimes he taught that division is justified by devotion to Jesus that conflicts with existing family relationships (Matt 10:21–23, 34–42; Mark 10:29–31). In fact, Jesus himself made a choice between his natural and his new spiritual family (Matt 12:26–50). Just before his death he made provision for his mother to be received

into the family of John (John 19:26–27). Jesus also refers on two occasions to social relations beyond the family; the person in need is one's neighbor and should be ministered to, even at personal cost (Luke 10:3–37; 11:5–8). His awareness of slaves and servants of various kinds is mentioned too often to enumerate.

Clearly, Jesus was no loner. He interacted with his family, friends, and neighbors and drew on their experiences and problems frequently in his teaching when he later began his public ministry. None of this, of course, is particularly notable. More interesting, at least for our purposes, are the rather full references to the sphere of economics and finance in Jesus' teaching. It has often been pointed out that finance is the single most common theme in the parables of Jesus, but his allusions are even more than appear at first sight.

*3. Finance and management.* In one comment Jesus portrays everyday life in terms of eating and drinking, doing business, farming, and building (Luke 17:28). It has already been shown that Jesus mentions farmers, shepherds, and fishermen in his parabolic teaching. He also refers to other occupations and demonstrates his knowledge of the social strata of his day when he mentions "the poor," both in general (Matt 14:7; John 12:8) and individually (Matt 12:41–44; Luke 21:1–4; 18:1–8); the merchant class (Matt 13:44–45); kings and princes (Matt 18:23; Luke 19:12); wealthy landowners (Luke 12:13–21; 16:19–31); servant managers (Matt 6:24; 18:23–35; 20:25–28 pars.; Mark 13:34–36; Luke 12:35–48; 16:1–3; John 2:8); day-laborers (Matt 20:1–16); and soldiers (Matt 8:5–13). Notably, Jesus does not inveigh against this social structure; he accepts its existence and advocates righteous conduct by everyone at whatever level of society they inhabit.<sup>36</sup>

*a. Finance.* What is righteous behavior in the realm of finance? First, Jesus warns against debt and advocates payment of debts, even when inconvenient (Matt 5:23–26 par.; 18:23–35; Luke 7:41–47). Lending should be generous (Matt 5:40–42; Luke 6:29–30). Taxes also should be paid in full, even to an unjust regime (Matt 22:15–22 pars.), and legitimate tithes also (Matt 23:23–24 par.). Jesus commends those who are financially astute and accumulate wealth (Matt 13:44–45; Luke 16:1–13), but strongly denigrates the worship of money or materialism (Luke 6:24–25; 12:13–21). He advocates contentment whatever the material circumstances (Matt 6:25–34), and commends the accumulation of eternal wealth more than earthly wealth (Matt 6:19–21 pars.; 6:24; Luke 16:19–31). He shows an awareness of monetary values (Mark 12:41–44; Luke 12:6–7; 15:8–9) and in fact makes quite wide reference to Greek, Tyrian, Roman, and Hebrew coinage: χαλκός (Mark 12:41), ἄργυρος (Matt 26:15), χρυσός (Matt 23:16–17), δηνάριος (Matt 20:2, 13; 22:20; Mark 6:37; Luke 10:35; 15:8–9), δραχμή (Luke 15:9), δίδραχμον (Matt 17:27),

<sup>36</sup> Similarly, when John the Baptist was asked by soldiers how they should demonstrate their repentance, he did not tell them to leave town or lay down their arms. He said: "Don't abuse your power and be content with your pay" (Luke 3:14).



ἀσσύριον (Matt 10:29), κοδράντης (Matt 5:26; Mark 12:42), λεπτόν (Mark 12:42; Luke 21:2), στατήρ (Matt 17:27), μνᾶ (Luke 19:13, 16), τάλαντον (Matt 18:24; 25:15–28), and κέρμα (John 2:15). He advocates trusting in God for financial provision on the one hand (Matt 10:5–10 pars.; Mark 12:41–44 par.), and wise planning on the other hand (Luke 22:36). Jesus does inveigh against greed and financial corruption (Luke 12:13–21; 15:11–32; John 2:13–17; and also his actions in the temple relating to the moneychangers in Matt 21:16 pars.) and recognizes the role of the courts in settling financial disputes (Luke 12:13–14; 18:1–8). He was familiar with the marketplaces of the region (Matt 11:16; Luke 7:32).

Although comparisons with the modern world are necessarily inexact, perhaps even misleading, it will be readily apparent that this teaching by Jesus has more affinity with what are now called “middle-class values” than with any revolutionary agenda! While this may be unwelcome news to some interpreters, this perception is strengthened when we consider his references to management and employment.

b. *Management.* Jesus makes occasional reference to real estate and the management activities of landlords (Matt 20:1–16; 21:33–44) and often refers to other administrators (Matt 18:23–25; Luke 12:42; 16:1–13). His most frequent theme in this connection is the accountability of employees to their employers (Matt 20:1–16; 21:33–44; 25:14–30; Luke 16:1–13). He advocates a strong work ethic, teaching a person's responsibility to God, not just to their human employers, to do a good job (Matt 24:45–51; Mark 13:34–36; Luke 12:35–48; 17:7–10; 19:11–27). Concerning the role of managers, Jesus advocates a humble attitude: managers should rule with the attitude of serving their employees, not domineering them (Matt 20:25–28). Jesus shows an awareness of the importance of delegation (Matt 25:14–30; Mark 13:34–36) and of hiring and firing responsibilities (Matt 20:1–16; 24:45–51), as well as the payment of fair wages (Matt 20:1–16; 25:14–30).

This brief survey suggests that far from being a subsistence peasant, whose financial knowledge was limited to bartering, going to market occasionally, and paying taxes, Jesus had personal knowledge and experience of the world of business. He had clearly thought about these matters at length and developed a carefully nuanced philosophy of money management. Why this should be so will be further explored in the next section.

4. *Occupation.* It has already been noted that when Jesus described everyday life, he referred to four human activities: eating and drinking, commerce, agriculture, and building (οικοδομῶν, Luke 17:28). He also refers to different kinds of constructions: barns (ἀποθήκη, Luke 12:18), watch towers (πύργος, Matt 21:33; Luke 13:4; 14:28–30), vineyards (ἀμπελῶν, Matt 20:1), houses (οἰκία, Matt 7:24–27 par.; John 14:1–14), palaces (βασιλείον, Luke 7:25), inns (πανδοχεῖον, Luke 10:34), temples (ναός, Matt 23:35; John 2:21), embankments (χάραξ, Luke 19:43–44), and cities (πόλις, Matt 5:14). Further, he refers to parts of houses such as rooftops (δῶμα, Matt 10:27; 24:17), the inner (private) room (ταμεῖον, Luke 12:3), storerooms (θησαυρός,

Matt 13:52), upper-level rooms (ἀνάγαιον, Mark 14:15), guest rooms in large dwellings (κατάλυμα, Luke 22:11), wedding halls (νομφών, Matt 22:10), and courtyards (αὐλή, Matt 26:3; John 10:16). He also recognizes the importance of home security (Matt 12:29; 24:43).

More impressive still are his allusions to a variety of constructions, such as clay ovens (κλίβανος, Matt 6:30), kilns (κάμινος, Matt 13:42, 50), toilets (ἀφεδρών, Matt 15:17), tombs (τάφος, Matt 23:27–29), millstones (μύλος, Matt 18:6; Luke 17:1–2), barricades (χάραξ, Luke 19:43), fences (φραγμός, Matt 21:38), animal stalls (φάτνη, Luke 13:15), wells (φρέαρ, Luke 14:5), entrances (θύρα, John 10:9), gates (πύλη, Matt 7:13–14), threshing floors (ἄλων, Matt 3:12), wine presses (ληνός, Matt 21:33), and wine troughs (ὕπολῆνιον, Matt 12:1).

Most pointed are Jesus' references to the activity of construction and some of its aspects: the act of quarrying stone and selecting the crucial cornerstone in Matt 21:42–44 pars. (λίθον ὃν ἀπεδοκίμασαν οἱ οἰκοδομοῦντες, οὗτος ἐγενήθη εἰς κεφαλὴν γωνίας); the decoration of tombs (κονιάω, Matt 23:27–28; Luke 11:47); the most vital aspect of construction, building on a bedrock foundation (Matt 7:24–27: τεθεμελίωτο γὰρ ἐπὶ τὴν πέτραν); and another vital aspect of construction, cost analysis prior to building (Luke 14:28–30). Other allusions are less impressive, but perhaps of interest: the making of clay (πηλός) to heal a blind man (John 9:6); the reference to the condition of timber—moist vs. dry (ὕγρός . . . ξύλον . . . ξηρός, Luke 23:31); the reference to digging deep in Matt 21:33; and the possible criticism of the construction quality of a wall in Luke 13:4. The allusion to moving a mountain by faith in Mark 11:22–23 could be an oblique appreciation of Herod's engineering achievement in moving one part of a hill to another location to construct the Herodian.

In light of all this knowledge of the building trade it is hard to resist the conclusion that Jesus was involved in construction. And it is significant that there are two clear references to wood: one, the famous reference to the wooden beam and the splinter in Matt 7:3–5, and the other being the reference to damp vs. dry wood in Luke 23:31 (there is also the mention of—possibly wooden—gates in Matt 7:13–14). These references to wood do not indicate the activity of a woodworker. Even they are aspects of the builder's trade; it is construction timber that is in view. In contrast with this paucity of allusions to wood is the huge variety of references and allusions to stone objects and buildings listed above.

Among the farming and domestic vocabulary mentioned above under Agrarian culture are some implements which were probably fashioned by the craftsman/builder when he had the time available, such as plows, sickles, yokes, winnowing forks, doors, and axes. A village craftsman in the first century had to be able to perform a variety of building tasks as required, and it would seem that Jesus (having been mentored by Joseph) was widely experienced in this trade. Moreover, building, like other trades, was then a family business, and when we add the considerable knowledge he displays of finance and management, it appears to be incontrovertible that this was the occupation of Jesus.

In fact, the popular perception that Jesus' teaching is drawn primarily from agriculture needs to be corrected: his allusions to finance and construction together are more numerous (and significant) than his allusions to agriculture.

### III. CONCLUSION

When the linguistic evidence is added to the literary evidence, it would seem that we are justified in concluding that Jesus was not merely a carpenter, but a builder.

The question inevitably arises: why did sixteenth-century translators employ the term "carpenter" to translate τέκτων? Prior to the Reformation, translations varied:

Gothic (AD 360): timryon  
 Vulgate (c. AD 400): faber  
 Anglo-Saxon (AD 995): smith  
 Wycliffe (AD 1389): smith  
 Tyndale (AD 1526): carpenter

Henceforth, all English, German, French, and other European translations followed the lead of William Tyndale in rendering τέκτων as carpenter. Why? One reason could be a few comments in the Church fathers about the alleged woodworking activity of Jesus. Another may be a thousand years of medieval paintings that portrayed Jesus as a European woodworker using European tools to fashion European furniture in a European workshop.

As a rule, unless they visited the land of Israel, people assumed that the material culture there was similar to their own. Since most European homes were constructed of timber, it was easy to assume that homes in Israel were built the same way, and that clothing and social customs were not much different from those of the translator.<sup>37</sup> Today, we should not ignore the evidence of archeology and ethnography that is now abundant as we translate biblical texts. In a land of omnipresent stone and few trees, a craftsman worked primarily in stone, and much less in wood or metal.<sup>38</sup> Such a craftsman is called "a builder," and he worked on all the structures mentioned by Jesus in his parables, as described above, as well as wine-presses, mill-stones, olive press stones, tomb stones, cisterns, farm terraces, vineyards, watch towers, house extensions, etc. An examination of the material culture of Nazareth confirms this review of the terminology of Jesus' occupation, but this merits a separate study.

<sup>37</sup> A notable exception is Jerome, who translated the NT in Bethlehem and hence was cognizant of the material culture of the land.

<sup>38</sup> Of some interest to students of the life of Jesus is the recently begun reconstruction of the first-century village of Nazareth on the grounds of the Nazareth hospital. Using the best current archeological data, a team of archeologists under Dr. Steven Pfann has supervised the building according to the methods and materials of Jesus' day. A "parable walk" (scripted by Dr. Kenneth Bailey) through the village is also in place. See [www.NazarethVillage.com](http://www.NazarethVillage.com) and [www.uhl.ac](http://www.uhl.ac).