
Coins of the Bible

A Collector's Starter Guide from **Denari Coins**

[Hero: widow's mite, tribute penny, and shekel of Tyre together]

Three coins appear in the most retold moments of the New Testament — and all three survive in enough numbers that ordinary people can own them. This guide covers what each coin is, what a genuine example costs in 2026, and how to buy one you can trust.

1. The Widow's Mite — the two-cent gift that outweighed gold

The scene: Mark 12, Luke 21. A poor widow gives two *lepta* — the smallest coins in circulation — and Jesus says she gave more than all the rich donors.

The coin: A bronze **prutah** of Judaea, most struck under Alexander Jannaeus (103–76 BC): an anchor on one side, an eight-pointed star on the other. No ruler's portrait — Jewish tradition forbade graven images. Tiny, crude, struck fast and often off-center: that's how they were born.

What to pay: worn but identifiable \$40–\$75 • clear anchor and star \$75–\$150 • exceptional or certified \$200+

Watch for: Grainy tourist-shop casts, painted-on green “patina,” and unattributed generic bronzes sold at mite prices. Buy attributed, or certified.

[Widow's mite beside a dime for scale]

2. The Tribute Penny — “render unto Caesar”

The scene: Matthew 22. Asked whether it's lawful to pay Roman tax, Jesus asks whose image the coin bears. “Caesar's.”

The coin: By long tradition, a silver **denarius of Tiberius** (AD 14–37) — the emperor's portrait on the front, his mother Livia enthroned as Pax on the back. The very portrait the story turns on.

What to pay: **honest Fine \$400–\$600 · attractive Very Fine \$700–\$1,200 · certified higher grades beyond**

Watch for: “Tribute pennies” priced like mites — they're either misidentified or fake. This is real Roman imperial silver; the price reflects it.

3. The Shekel of Tyre — the thirty pieces of silver

The scene: Matthew 26. Judas's payment — and the only coin the Temple accepted for the annual tax, because of its reliably pure silver.

The coin: A thick silver **shekel or half-shekel of Tyre:** the laureate head of the god Melqart, and an eagle. The irony that the Temple's official coin carried a pagan god is part of its story.

What to pay: **half-shekels \$600–\$1,000 · full shekels \$1,200–\$2,500 in collectible grade · dated or high-grade pieces higher**

Watch for: Cast copies abound in souvenir markets. Weight matters: a genuine full shekel is a substantial 13-plus grams of silver.

Building the Set

Start with the mite (accessible), add the tribute penny when budget allows (the portrait coin), and let the shekel be the capstone. Three coins, one narrative arc — each a genuine object that circulated in the world the Gospels describe.

The Three Rules of Buying Safely

1. **Attribution, not adjectives.** “Biblical coin” is marketing; “prutah of Alexander Jannaeus, anchor/star” is a coin. Expect ruler, type, weight, and diameter in every listing.
2. **Guarantee in writing.** Buy from a dealer who guarantees authenticity forever — or buy certified (NGC Ancients) and let the label settle it.
3. **The too-good deal always is.** A \$25 “genuine widow's mite,” a \$150 “tribute penny,” a \$300 “shekel of Tyre” — famous names at impossible prices are the oldest trick in the hobby.

Every Biblical coin at Denari is attributed, photographed both sides, and guaranteed genuine.

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