

## Christian Gatherings

As mentioned earlier, coming to the Lord's house is an important part of family religious life. Religious gatherings in the home also have a place. In early Christianity there were not church buildings on every other street corner. The apostles went from house to house teaching and preaching to the people. Men and women would invite others over to their homes for worship. The church in Jerusalem met in a home (Ac 12:12). In Philippi, Lydia's house served as the "church" (Ac 16:40).



Houses can still serve as places for like-minded Christians to gather and discuss the things of God. Bible studies are often held in individual homes and where Christians want to meet and do not have access to a church building, homes are used. Many Christian congregations have begun as "house-churches."

## Grow in Grace

Learning to know God and His Son Jesus Christ is the best education we will ever receive. Peter summed it up in his second letter when he wrote, "Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen." This is what we want for ourselves. We want to *grow* in our knowledge and in our faith in Jesus.

- < Family worship
- < Training of our children
- < Journeys to the Lord's house
- < Using the Bible at home
- < Gathering with fellow believers

Through things like these the Holy Spirit keeps training us and teaching us so we can be confident in and prepared for the life to come.

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## Resources

*Manners and Customs of Bible Lands* by Fred H. Wight

# BIBLE CUSTOMS AND CULTURE SERIES "HOME AND FAMILY IN BIBLE TIMES" PART EIGHT: RELIGION IN THE HOME

## HOME AND FAMILY IN BIBLE TIMES Religion in the Home

May is the month of graduations. Thousands of students complete their courses of education and receive their certificates and degrees. Education is a valuable thing and there are many fields of study a person can pursue. However, there is no education more important than the education the Lord gives us on matters that relate to Him.

All one's knowledge of physics and chemistry, science and social studies, mathematics and music will mean nothing at the hour of death. But what has been learned about Jesus Christ, God's Son, will mean everything for "Whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."

Through God's word and the power of the Holy Spirit, the soul learns of Jesus who died and rose again from the dead to take away the sins of the world so that we can stand before our Creator without fear, and look forward to the joy of the new heavens and the new earth where only righteousness will dwell.

The message of Christ can be taught by pastors and teachers, but this teaching *must also be made a part of home and family life*. Just as a student will do better in secular subjects if work is done at home, so also in spiritual subjects a student will have a far greater understanding and trust if these things are considered and emphasized in the home from day to day.

Christian education in the home is also important for the adults. None of us ever achieves perfect knowledge or depth of wisdom in spiritual things. All of us can benefit from continued study of God's word for guidance and strength. Hopefully the words that were spoken to the Hebrews will not apply to us. Heb 5:11-12, "It is hard to explain because you are slow to learn. In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God' sword all over again. You need milk, not solid food!" The Hebrews had been acquainted with God's word for a long time, yet they had not made any effort

to continue their education in it or make it a major part of their lives. As a consequence, they did not understand some of the basic teachings of the apostles— even though they should have known those and even more by that time! The word of Christ had not been a part of their home and family lives, and it showed.

During this time of year when a lot of emphasis is placed on education and graduation, remember how important it is to be educated by the Lord your God. Say with King David (Ps 25:4-5), “Show me your ways, O LORD, teach me your paths; guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my Savior, and my hope is in you all day long.” Our hope is in Him. He wants so much for us to hear that hope and to know it.

Look now at how some of those living during Bible times made spiritual things a focus in their homes:

### **The Family Altar**

When Abraham came to Bethel he built an altar and called on the name of the Lord. Later he built one and Hebron. Jacob built an altar at Shechem. Around these altars they worshiped God. Altars were a reminder that God could only be approached through sacrifice. Now, Christ our Passover Lamb has been sacrificed, and we approach God through Him. Altars remind us of His offering to God on our behalf.



We may not have an altar of stones built up in our living room, but we certainly might have things to remind us of the work our Lord Jesus did to save us from our sins— a cross or a crucifix that hangs on the wall; a plaque or a picture. We can use pictures and symbols to help keep our Lord in mind at home.

### **The Solemn Duty of Religious Education**

In Deuteronomy 4:9 the Lord gave instructions to the Israelite parents, “Only be careful, and watch yourselves closely so that you do not forget the things your eyes have seen or let them slip from your heart as long as you live. Teach them to your children and to their children after them.” Thus much religious education was done in the home. Parents taught their children and grandchildren the word of the Lord. In the New Testament, the young pastor Timothy had no doubt received much of his early religious training

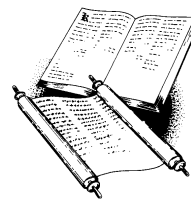


from his grandmother and mother (2 Tim 1:5). “It became the very solemn duty of Hebrew parents to teach their children . . . and also to explain to them the real meaning of religious observances” (Wight, 120).

### **Family Journeys to the House of the Lord**

Three times a year the men of Israel would go to the temple in Jerusalem. Sometimes the whole family would go along. Usually the pilgrimage would take place around one of the major Jewish festivals. The Passover was an especially appropriate time for the Jews to be in Jerusalem. When Jesus was twelve years old His parents went to Jerusalem with Him for the Passover. During that visit, He spent much time in His Father’s house (Lk 2:49). Coming to the Lord’s house was a part of each family’s spiritual life.

We too make family journeys to the Lord’s house when we come to worship at church. This is good, for Heb 10:25 tells us, “Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another— and all the more as you see the Day approaching.



### **The Bible in the Home**

In the days of Jesus and before, it was much more difficult to get a copy of the Scriptures than it is today. They did not have the modern day printing press, so copies were made by hand and were in shorter supply. Synagogues would have copies of the Old Testament. Later on in New Testament times, monks and other scholars were responsible for doing much of the copy work.

Scripture used in the home was often recited from memory as one generation taught the next. Jewish boys were required to recite what was known as the *shema*. This was a prayer made up of three Scriptures (Dt 6:4-9; 11:13-21; Num 15:37-41).

We have the tremendous gift now of Bibles in our own language that are easily accessible. Nobody is too poor to own a Bible. Unlike Jesus who would have had to borrow a copy of the Old Testament from the local synagogue, we have the Old and New Testaments on our bookshelves at home to read anytime. As a result of this, the word of God can really become part of our everyday lives.