

HOME AND FAMILY IN BIBLE TIMES

A Typical Day

As we look in on the household activities of an Old Testament family, we find their day a little different than ours. For one thing, their "day" began with night. The Jewish day began around 6:00 pm as the sun was setting.

[illegible]

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Before Sunrise

Before the sun came up, the members of the household were up. It was important to get work done before the day became too hot. Much was accomplished in the early waking hours (Gen 22:3; Lk 21:38; Mk 1:35). Breakfast was eaten anytime from morning until noon depending on the family and the work of the husband. Only two meals a day were usually eaten.

Early Morning

One of the first sounds to be heard in the morning was the grinding of grain. This was important work that needed to be done daily in the house— usually requiring about a half day of effort. Poorer people would grind barley while those with more money could afford to use wheat. A Palestinian village would “sing” with the sound of millstones. They were an indication of life and activity. When Jeremiah warned

of God's judgment on Israel, he said, "I will banish from them the sounds of joy and gladness, the voices of bride and bridegroom, the sound of millstones and the light of the lamp."

The millstones were 12-24 inches in diameter and sat one on top of the other. A wooden handle was attached to the top stone and a wooden pivot was fixed so that it could be turned on the lower one. The grinding would be done by two women (usually slaves or female servants) sitting on the ground and facing one another. They would alternately push and pull on the handle. While the wheat or barley was added through a funnel in the pivot, the flour was caught on the ground with a cloth. Generally the lower millstone was heavier than the upper one to make the work



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easier. Once ground, the flour was mixed with water and yeast, prior to being placed on the baking stone of the oven.

Scripture Study

How does the millstone figure in these Bible verses?

Jdg 9:53
Mk 9:42

Making Clothes

Another activity could include the sewing of clothes. Jewish women would make clothing from the wool that came from their flocks. They would have to spin it into yarn (Pr 31:19). Women would often spin together and thus some social time was provided along with the work. Having spun the wool, the yarn would be used to sew other material together or woven into wool clothing and blankets. Without sewing

machines or modern needles, they used needles made of bronze or splinters of bone with a sharpened tip.

Industrious women would make more than they needed for their own families and take the extra to the market to sell it.

Washing Clothes

Yes, part of a day would be consumed with doing the laundry just as it is today. Clothes would be dipped in and out of the water and then pounded with a club to loosen dirt and stains. Various vegetable alkalis were used to make soap.



Carrying Water

The women also worked to bring enough water into the house for the day. They would carry jars or pitchers to a well or spring and fill them. Each household had its own jars or skins for carrying water. Buckets were not provided at the well. Syrian women would typically

Wight carry water jars on their shoulders (sometimes on their hips), while

many in Palestine carried it on their heads. Because the job of carrying water was almost exclusively done by women, the disciples knew just whom to follow to the upper room when Jesus told them to find a man carrying a pitcher of water (Mk 14:13).

Buying Food

If there was not enough food in the house, a trip to the local market was in order. Often, shopping would be a daily exercise because without refrigerators or freezers it was impossible to keep most food more than a day.

General Housekeeping

While the water-carrying and grinding were commonly being done by household servants, the mother of the house and her children were busied with housekeeping. The floors of the dwelling needed to be swept carefully, especially if the animals had spent the night inside. Also the fire had to be made ready for cooking.

What Were the Men Doing?

While the women were tending to the important duties around the house, the men were spending the day working at their profession—farming, metalwork, shepherding, etc. Once in a while, men would come home at the time of the midday rest when the whole household would stop working. Most times, the men would rest at their place of work.

Siesta and Evening Meal

From about 11 am until 4 pm work would stop. It was simply too hot to carry on anything productive. Family members would sleep or rest quietly in their tents or houses (Gen 18:1; 2 Sam 4:5). Shops and markets would often close during these hours of the day. At the end of the rest, the family would eat their evening meal together. The timing of this meal would depend on when the husband returned from work.

Washing at the End of the Day

After the evening meal was eaten, it was time to wash and prepare for sleep. The day was at its end—and at sundown the next day would begin. Rivers and springs were common locations for bathing. Families went to bed early so as to rise, once again, before the sun.

The Lord Provides

The people of Bible times had daily routines just as we do today. Each day the Lord gave them the strength and the ability to carry out their tasks—through which he gave them blessings like clothing, food, and shelter. We pray that the Lord would support us every day in our daily tasks, giving us the willingness to work not just for ourselves, but for Him and to His glory.

Resources

Manners and Customs of Bible Lands by Fred H. Wight
Bible Times and Customs by Tim Gibson