

HOME AND FAMILY IN BIBLE TIMES

Where They Lived (1)

Our lives today are 21st century flurries of activity. We drive from here to there in our cars. We rush the children off to school. We eat food heated in a microwave. We discover that life is lived very differently now than it was several thousand years ago in the days of Abraham or Jesus. The customs and culture of Bible days are far removed from us both in time and distance, yet they are not to be forgotten. If they are, the Bible reader will miss much of the richness and detail that can be enjoyed from the text. Bible truths are timeless, however the Scriptures were written at a particular time and place in history. When we understand that times and place a little bit better, our understanding of God's Word will grow too.

Home and Family Life

There is much to talk about in the area of Bible manners and customs. In this series of studies, we will consider especially the *home and family life* of the people. For example— where they lived, how they raised their children, and what the daily activities were for a typical family.

The Family Dwelling Place—The Tent

One of the most common dwellings for the people of the Old Testament was the *tent*. Tents are mentioned early in the book of Genesis when it is said of Jabbal, "He was the father of those who dwell in tents and have livestock" (4:20). The tent was the shelter of choice for those who moved from place to place frequently, such as those who tended livestock.

There are still tribes in Palestine today who live in tents and we can learn much from them about ancient tent-dwellings.

The Construction of the Tent

The tent material was black cloth made from goat hair. The goat hair was then stretched across a series of poles and staked down by cords and pegs to form a sheltered area (Jdg 4:21). The hair was very rough and prickly, identical to what was known as "sackcloth." At first, the tent roof would not be waterproof, but after the first rain it would shrink together and keep the weather out. In the summertime the sides were lifted and the tent could be used as a large sunshade.



Inside the Tent

SCRIPTURE STUDY

How does the tent play a role in Gen 18:1-2, 10-15?

A typical tent would be separated into two or three rooms with goat hair curtains for dividers. The first room would serve as a reception area where the man of the house would greet guests. The woman and children would generally stay and work in the second room, and a third room would be for servants or animals.

Rugs covered the floor of the tent during the day and at night sleeping carpets would be brought out and clothes would become blankets.

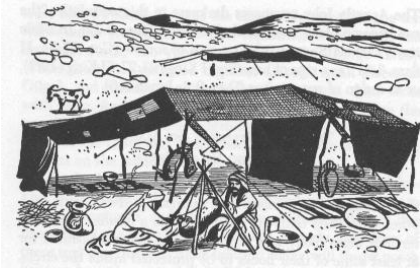
Sacks of grain would be piled around the tent posts as well as a mortar and pestle to use in pounding out the grain. Skin bags would hang in the tent to be used for water or wine. "Kitchen" items might include a few pots, kettles, and pans. Light was provided after dark by an olive oil lamp. All cooking was done over a fire— during the cold season inside on a small stone hearth; when it was hot the fire would be built outside the tent.

Encampments

Often one would not find a tent alone out in the desert. Usually a group of families put their tents near each other or else one family had several different tents. Jacob's family had multiple tents— his, Rachel's, and Leah's, and those of the maid servants are mentioned in the Bible.

Tent Repair and Enlargement

On a rather interesting note, we find that new tents were not very common. Instead, an old tent was continually repaired piece by piece.



Goat hair would be gathered throughout the year and then when the time for fixing the tent had come, the bad part would be cut out and a new strip of material put in. The old piece would then be used for a side curtain. Tents were passed down from one generation to the next.

Sometimes it was necessary to increase the size of the tent. This was done by adding a new section to the old tent, much like we might add a room onto a house. Enlarging a tent was also a sign of prosperity since it meant a good supply of goat hair was at one's disposal.

- ! Read and consider how Isaiah used the picture of enlarging a tent in 54:2.
- ! Read Isaiah 40:22. How does the tent describe the presence of the LORD?

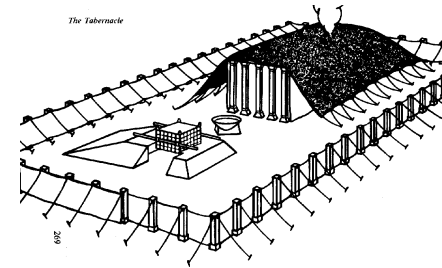
The Great Tent

The largest and most elaborate tent in the Bible is, of course, the tabernacle of the LORD God. After God had led the Israelites out of their slavery in the land of Egypt He had them build a tent of worship for Him—a place where He would come and dwell with them and make His presence known to them.

SCRIPTURE STUDY

Take some time to read about the tabernacle in Exodus 36-40

The tabernacle was richly furnished with gold and bronze and the finest of linens. The cost for this tent might easily approach \$20 million in today's money.



Other "Tents"

The tent played a large role in the life and culture of the Old Testament Bible people. But the word *tent* or *dwelling place* also shows up in the New Testament in several key situations.

- ! Aquila and Priscilla (Ac 18) were tent-makers who became good friends of the Apostle Paul.
- ! The "tent" of the body. Paul and Peter both refer to the body as a "tent" or temporary dwelling place. Thinking of our bodies in this way, we are reminded that our home is not really here on earth, but we are simply pilgrims on the way to heaven. One day these earthly "tents" will become permanent dwellings in heaven thanks to the sufferings and death of our Lord Jesus Christ. See 2 Corinthians 5:1-7; 2 Peter 1:10-19

