

Everyday Life in Bible Times
Chapter 5 – The Home and Its Furnishings

Lesson 5.01
Primitive Shelters

Long ago, people lived in various kinds of homes in a variety of places. Some homes were very simple. A few were very fancy.

The simplest homes that we find in the Bible were **caves** in a rocky hill that had a wide hole. Does that mean Jewish people began as cavemen? No! But Israel's land was hilly, so it naturally has many caves. Some caves are large. Some caves are small.

Often people living in the country used those caves for covering and protection for themselves and for their animals.

Example: A shepherd traveling with his sheep flock at sunset, he led the flock to a large cave for protection during the night.

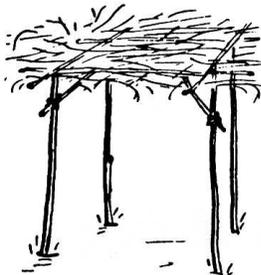
Another example: Long ago, people who were sick with leprosy could not live in the city among people. They must stay apart. Several people who had that same disease grouped together and they made caves their home.

In the Bible, you read stories about King Saul chasing David and search for him. Saul wanted to kill David. So David, his family, and his friends hid in caves.

People also used caves for tombs (graves). They put the body of a dead person in a cave and closed the cave with a large stone.

Some people built nice homes that were attached to caves, like American Indians did long ago, living in the southwest.

The cave protected them. When the weather was cold, they stayed warm in the cave with fire and sharing body heat.



Another kind of shelter was a **booth**. It was not really a home to live in, but the booth gave workers temporary protection from the sun.

The booth had four poles and a roof of tree branches, large leaves, and long grass.

If it rained, the booth was not good protection.

People built their booths, where?

First, in their vineyard – grape farm – on top of their stone watchtower.

Everyday Life in Bible Times
Chapter 5 – The Home and Its Furnishings

Second, near the threshing floor – the place they cleaned the grain – so they could rest for a short time in the shade.

For another kind of temporary shelter, they cut tall grass that grows in shallow water and they wove that grass into a mat, they covered it with mud, and raised it up as four walls and a roof. People living in Egypt near the Nile river made these kind of huts. People living in Israel near the river Jordan have made these kinds of huts, too.

Those shelters were not strong. A heavy rain or flood could easily destroy them. And when that happened, people built new shelters.

STUDY QUESTION

Read Leviticus 23:42

God commanded that every year for one week Jewish people should live where?

Lesson 5.02

Tents

People who lived outdoors use tents for their protection -- protection from the sun, rain, and wind.

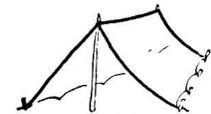
People who herded sheep or cows moved from place to place with their livestock for grazing. They lived in tents which they could take down, pack, and carry on a donkey or wagon. When they arrived at a new place, they unpacked the tent, set it up, and lived in for a short time, until they moved again.

For 40 years, all people of Israel lived in tents while they traveled from Egypt to the promised land, wandering in the desert, as God led them

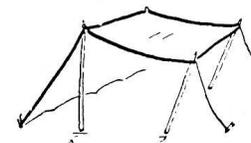
Their Tabernacle (worship house; portable temple) also was a tent that had two rooms and an outside courtyard with a cloth fence.

Sometimes shepherds use that same idea. The shepherds had their own tent to live in, and also a fenced area for their sheep during the night.

Over the centuries, tents have not changed. There are various kinds of tents – from small and simple, for one or two people, to large tents that had rooms for a family.



A large blanket could become a small tent – put up two poles and tie a rope between them. Then hang the blanket over the rope as an A-frame.



Or set up to more poles to raise one side of the blanket, with the other side sloping to the ground as a lean-to.

Everyday Life in Bible Times
Chapter 5 – The Home and Its Furnishings

Or set up four poles, holding up each corner of the blanket, as a canopy.

Large tents had two tall central poles with a rope between them. The tent canvas sloped out both sides from the center, down to a height of 3 or 4 feet above the ground. The edges of the tent were tied with cords to stakes driven in the ground with a hammer.

Another canvas was hung vertically between the two central poles. This divided the tent into two large rooms, one room for women, and the other room for men.

They stacked boxes and bags of supplies in the middle of the tent along the partition.

The tent had a front awning that, at night, they unfastened and folded down to close the tent.



STUDY QUESTION

Read 2nd Corinthians 5:1

A tent is compared to what?

Lesson 5.03
Tent Furnishings

Lamps

People living in tents had various things for making life comfortable.

First they had oil lamps. When the sunset, they lit the lamps so they could still have light.



Most lamps they made with clay, like pottery.

Their lamps had two designs.

A simple lamp was a small bowl the rim that was pinched at one side. That held a cloth wick.

Pour in the olive oil into the bowl and then light the wick.

More fancy lamps had a bowl with a spout on the side to hold the wick. The bowl in the middle had a small hole in the top, to pour in oil, and it had a handle on side, for carrying. It almost looked like our teapot today.

People put their lamps on a small table – a lamp stand – so the lamp could light the whole room.

Everyday Life in Bible Times
Chapter 5 – The Home and Its Furnishings

Also, they tied cords to the sides of the lamp and hung it up.

Their oil lamps did not have a glass chimney protector, so a wind could blow out the flame.

Floor Mats

Tent dwellers lay a large mat on the tent floor. They wove the mat from sheep's wool or goat hair. Sometimes they wove fancy designs into the mat.

During the day they could sit on the mat.

During the night they slept on it.

If they didn't want to use the mat, they could roll it up and put it aside.

Cooking Utensil

How did people living in tents cook their food?

They dug a small pit and built a fire in that pit.

Over the fire they had a three-legged stand for holding metal cooking pots and pans.

Also, they had jars, baskets, a trough for kneading bread, and various kitchen equipment.

STUDY QUESTION

Read Psalm 119:105

A lamp is compared to what?

Lesson 5.04

A Simple House

Long ago in Israel, people lived in various kinds of homes.

In this lesson we will learn how they made a simple house.

First the builder decide where to build the house.

A bad place to build is on low land near water.

A hard rain will make the water rise and flood the house.

It's better to build on high ground that is level, or on a hill, cutting out a level ledge, and build there.

Building on rock is best.

Sand is weak foundation.

Long ago, they did not dig down for a foundation.

Everyday Life in Bible Times
Chapter 5 – The Home and Its Furnishings

Their houses did not have basements.

When they decided the place to build their house, they made the ground level.
Then they made a line for the four sides of the foundation.

Then they made mortar (cement) by mixing limestone, sand, and water.
They spread mortar or clay on the foundation line.

Then they lay bricks, rectangular limestones, or rough field stones on the foundation line.

Their bricks were either adobe mud bricks (like American southwest Indians made) or hard fired-clay bricks.

They started with one stone in the corner.
That was called the **corner stone**.
Then they built from that stone, around the foundation line.
Then they poured mortar in the spaces between the stones.

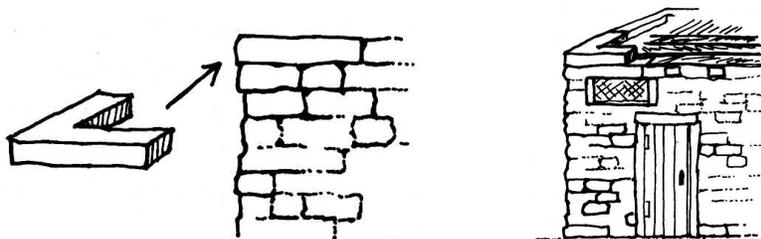
Then they build up the wall, overlapping the stone bocks.

They made sure the wall vertically straight by hanging a string with a weight in line with the corner stone. When they build the wall, they followed that string for their vertical guide.

In the place they planned to put the door, they set up a wood frame.
Then they built the wall on both sides of the frame.
The lay a large stone at the top of the door frame to span the width of the door.

They did the same thing in the places they put windows.
They made the wood frame for the window, and then they built the wall around it.

They put an “L” shaped stone on the upper corner of each wall, to hold the two walls together.
That L-shaped stone is called “the head of the corner.”



When the walls were finished, they lay four or five large wood beams across to opposite walls.
Then they lay wood poles 4 to 6 inches apart, across (perpendicular to) the large beams.
Those poles supported the roof.

We will explain about the roof later.

Everyday Life in Bible Times
Chapter 5 – The Home and Its Furnishings

If the roof needed more support in the center of the building, they added a center vertical beam that supported the center horizontal beam.

STUDY QUESTION

Read 1st Peter 2:4-7

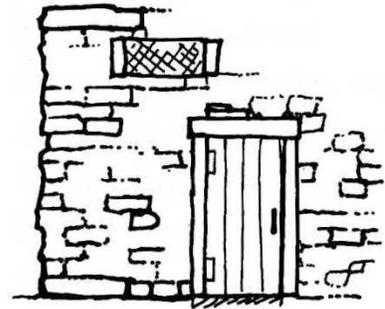
These verse compare building stones to what?

Lesson 5.05

Doors and Windows

In our last lesson we learned how people living in Bible times built small, simple houses with just four walls.

Now we will look at how they made doors and windows in those homes.



Doors

Their doors were big – 6 feet high and 2½ feet wide.

Doors had thick wood vertical boards, side by side.

The boards were cut evenly across at the top and bottom, except for the last board.

The hinge for the door was made into the last board in the door.

A pin or pole in was in that board in extended
up into the top lintel beam
and down into the floor.

Those pins held the door up and the door swung open on those two pins.

The door had a lock that was a thick wood board, lowered into side brackets on the wall,
or the board slid from the door into a bracket on the wall.

Some doors had large keys that they put into the door and lifted a hook.

Or the key stuck into the side board and lifted a hook.

Fancy doors had wood carvings that made pictures.

Some doors had a thin metal covering.

A few kings had stone doors.

Windows

Our windows today are large rectangles covered with glass.

That is not what home windows looked like in Bible times.

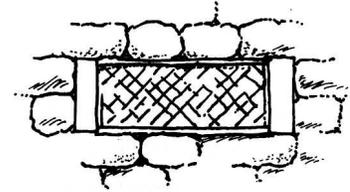
A few fancy homes had large windows, but most didn't.

Everyday Life in Bible Times
Chapter 5 – The Home and Its Furnishings

Their windows were high and narrow, to keep robbers out.

Most windows were left open.

But if it got cold, they covered it with a wood board.



Some windows had curtains or a lattice made of thin strips of wood to prevent nosy people looking in.

STUDY QUESTION

Read Revelation 3:20

That verse compares a door to a heart. Who is knocking?

Lesson 5.06

Roof

Long ago, Jewish houses did not have a pointed gabled roof, like ours.
Their roof was flat.

How did they make that roof?

When the walls were finished, they laid...

1. large wood beams across between the walls.
2. thin strips of wood, or poles, or wider boards across those beams.
3. wood sticks across the pole.
4. lay grass matted all over the roof.
5. wet clay on top of the grass.
6. more sticks, crossing each other.
7. straw.
8. more clay.

They added sticks, clay, and straw until the roof was about one foot thick.

Then they let the layers settle and the clay dry.

Then, finally, they added one more layer of clay about 1 or 2 inches thick.

They smoothed the clay, pushing it down with a stone roller, and let it dry.

Keeping a roof fixed was a lot of continuous work:

- cover leaks.
- filling in depressions.
- supporting weak places.

If they ignore the roof, eventually it will collapse.

Now...

The walls are finished.

Everyday Life in Bible Times
Chapter 5 – The Home and Its Furnishings

The roof is finished.

The house needs one more thing – a **parapet**.

A parapet is a low wall, about 3 feet high, all around the edge of the roof.

God's law required that houses in Israel must have a parapet, so that when people walk on the roof, they don't accidentally fall off. The parapet protects them.

STUDY QUESTION

Read Mark 2:1-12

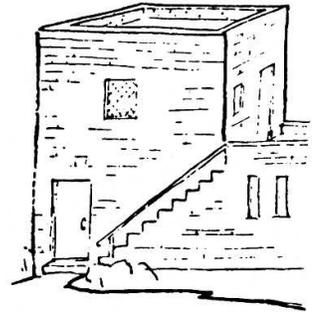
Some men used a roof to help their friend. How?

Lesson 5.07

Outdoor Stairway

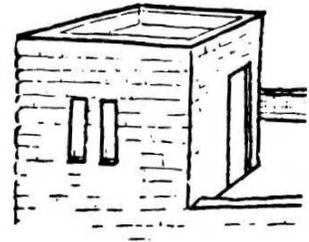
Long ago, houses in Israel had 4 walls.
The roof was flat and it had a parapet.

People often went up on the roof.
How did they get up there? With a ladder? No.
They built stairs outside, on the side of the house.



Remember that story about men that carried their sick friend up to the roof. That house had stairs outside up to the roof.

A few large homes had indoor stairs to the roof. The opening for the stairway on the roof had a shelter over it, to protect the inside of the house from rain.



People used their roof for fellowship, meeting with family and friends, and chatting.

They used their roof for their work. For example:
Farmers put fruits and vegetables on the roof to dry in the hot sun

If people wanted a quiet place to rest or pray, the roof was a good place.
During hot summer months, the family may sleep outside on the roof where it felt cool.

On the roof was a good place to make announcements to the community.

The Bible has several stories about people on the roof, when something important happened.

STUDY QUESTION

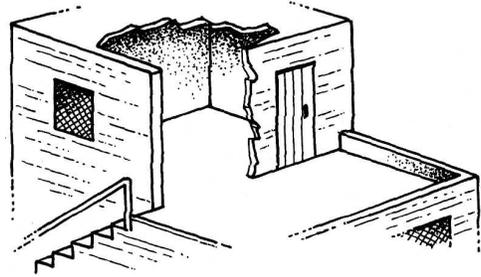
Read Joshua 2:6

Rahab used her roof for what?

Everyday Life in Bible Times
Chapter 5 – The Home and Its Furnishings

Lesson 5.08
Extra Room

Home is for people's residence – their place to live.
But sometimes they like to have an additional room.
Where?



If they have enough land, they could build a room on the side of the house. But houses in the city were close together. So they added their room on the roof – that is called the **upper room**. They used the outdoor stairway for the upper room.

They used the additional room for...

1. Work – the family business, like
a carpenter.
a potter.
a weaver.
etc.
2. Visitors – If visitors came to sleep overnight they could use the extra room as a guest room.
3. Rental – Sometimes people paid the family for using their additional room to live or have meetings.

Remember where Jesus met with His Disciples for Passover, where Jesus gave us the Lord's Supper. They met in a large upper room.

The next day Jesus was crucified. He died, and then He rose again.
His Disciples were scared. They hid where? In an upper room.
There Jesus appeared to them.

Forty days later Jesus ascended.
Jesus told His Disciples to go to Jerusalem and wait.
They met where? In a large upper room.

The Bible has many more stories about people that lived in an upper room.

STUDY QUESTION

Read Acts 9:37-43

How did Christians in Joppa use their upper room?

Everyday Life in Bible Times
Chapter 5 – The Home and Its Furnishings

Lesson 5.09
Home Furnishings:
Cooking Utensils

A family that lived in a simple, one-room house had everything they need in that room. Their goal was not to make the home look fancy, for impressing their friends. No. They wanted that home to be comfortable.

The things that they had in their house were the things they must have for living –
for eating,
for sleeping,
for working.
...that's all.

The house had a large metal pot supported by three poles. They made a cooking fire in that pot.

What did they use as fuel for fire?
straw.
wood.
animal dung (poop).

Did that animal dung stink? No.
When the animal pooped, they left it in the sun to dry.
After that, it didn't stink.
It burns like charcoal.

Their home also could have a hole in the floor for fire. They had metal pots for cooking suspended over the fire.

A pot could be copper or brass.
It had a handle for holding and hanging.

They had metal knives and spoons with wood handles to prepare food for cooking.

They had clay pottery for holding water, wine, milk, oil, and fruit syrup.

They had clay pitchers, cups, plates, bowls, etc.
After they cooked and ate their meal, they washed their dirty dishes and then turned upside down to let them dry.

STUDY QUESTION
Read Matthew 23:25-26
Jesus compares cups and dishes to what?

Everyday Life in Bible Times
Chapter 5 – The Home and Its Furnishings

Lesson 5.10

Storage

Long ago small Jewish homes had several large clay jars and boxes for keeping wheat, flour, and other dried food for their cooking. Those boxes were about the size of three or four bushels.

The family also saved dried fruits, vegetables, and herbs, by hanging them from the ceiling cross beams.

They hung wine skins from the rafters.

Another good place to hang dried fruits and vegetable was over the cooking fire, in the smoke.

Mats and Rugs

Most small homes had a floor that was clay. It could be cold and dusty.

So the family covered the floor with a large rug or mat that made the floor more comfortable.

They made those mats by weave long grass or wool.

During the day they used those mats for sitting.

When they ate, they lay a clean mat and put their food plates and bowls on it.

Some homes had low tables a few inches high.

But many people just lay the mat right on the floor.

When they ate, they did not sit in chairs. They lay on their sides.

Beds

Several homes had low beds that had a wooden rectangular frame and leather woven web.

They laid a mat on that and people slept on the mat.

Many homes did not have a bed.

People slept on mats on the floor.

During the day people wore heavy cloaks.

At night they flipped those cloaks around and they became blankets.

Chairs

Fancy homes had chairs.

But in small homes people just sat on the floor.

They could make sitting more comfortable by rolling up a rug, and sitting on that.

Everyday Life in Bible Times
Chapter 5 – The Home and Its Furnishings

Daily Chores

The manager for Jewish homes was the wife...
doing the house work.
cooking.
sewing.
supervising children.
teaching them.
and training them in various family responsibilities.

Women's work was not limited only to inside the house.

The family was outside a lot...
washing.
grinding grain.
carrying water home.

Often they had an outdoor oven.

The family time outside let them socialize with other families and friends.

Jewish families did not scatter, each person doing their own thing.
Family was close, sharing life together, sharing a lot of love together.

STUDY QUESTION

Read Luke 15:8-10

What did the woman do to find her lost coin?

Lesson 5.11

Large Homes

Thus far we have studied about small homes.
Now we will learn about larger homes.

Large homes normally had three rooms.
In the front, one large rectangular room.
in the back, two smaller rooms.

Outside, in the front, they had a walled area called the **court yard**.
The court yard had a garden for growing vegetables and fruit trees.
In that court yard, the home had a stairs up to the second floor, that had a balcony.

The exterior of the house was plain.
The interior was fancy and beautiful.

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Chapter 5 – The Home and Its Furnishings

Other homes were built as four houses around a central courtyard.
Each house had a front door that faced the courtyard.
All four houses shared that courtyard, that had a garden.

Sometimes the courtyard was sunken, so it had steps up to each home.

Those homes regularly had a second story.

Really large homes, like for kings and high priests, were really fancy, for making an impression.
Those homes were built with stone walls and floor – marble.

You could see fancy carvings in wood and gold.
They had curtains that were beautiful and thick.

The front door was heavy and thick for protection.

Those homes were for inviting friends to dinner parties.

Old Testament prophets harshly criticized them for their fat pleasures and parties, ignoring poor people around them.

Also, Jesus criticized priests when He saw them making long prayers to make an impression, while they pocketed the people's donations for themselves.

STUDY QUESTION

Read John 18:12 -27

What happened at the High Priest's house?

Lesson 5.12

Villages, Towns, and Cities

Farm homes were scattered, far from each other. Each home is on its own farm land.

But many people don't have farms. They live in cities.
Their homes are close to one another.

Long ago people lived in cities because..

1. That was easier for them to trade and do business with each other.
2. It was easier for them to socialize together.
3. They could share important things for their life, like water, defense, and travel.

Many cities had walls around them for protection against enemy armies.

We think of cities as straight streets in a grid. But cities of Israel in Bible times were not like that.

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Chapter 5 – The Home and Its Furnishings

Roads were winding.
Homes were built in haphazard clusters.

The best places for establishing a city were

1. on a hill, for better defense, with walls.
2. near water – a spring or a well.
Near a river could be okay. But if a river tended to flood often, no.
3. at the intersection of two important roads.
People built their houses along the road.

Most cities grew without any prior planning.

Sometimes houses were so close to each other that they almost touched.
People could walk from one roof to the next.

City streets were narrow and crooked;
they just followed where people naturally walked.

But when a city grew large, political leaders made plans for wide straight streets in a grid.

Leaders also needed to plan better ways to bring water to the various parts of the city and remove waste.

Most streets were just dirt, no hard surface.
If it rained, the street became muddy and hard to travel.

New parts of some larger cities had streets paved with stone.

Some homes that were built on both sides of a narrow street. If those homes had a second level, they had balconies over the street that touched each other like a bridge.

STUDY QUESTION

Read Acts 9: 11

What was the name of that street? (*This is the only street named in the Bible.*)

Who lived there?

Who was his visitor?

Lesson 5.13

Marketplaces

The community had a place where people gathered for buying and selling.
That area was called the **market**.

People that had the same profession, the same business, they tended to gather in one area on the same day.

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Chapter 5 – The Home and Its Furnishings

The city had various places for selling various things.

Food

farm fruits and vegetables
meat – some raw, some cooked
bread

Things for the home

pottery
clothing
tools
etc.

Of course, the government set up their tables for tax collection.
And Market places also had plenty of beggars, thieves, and robbers.

The market was a noisy place, with crowds of people discussing... arguing.

“How much does that cost?...
No! That’s too high. terrible. It’s not worth that much.
I will pay you this much... No?”

Negotiating. Haggling.
That still happens in eastern countries.

Building New Towns on Old.

In old cities that remain a long time, something interesting happened.

When people had trash, they just threw it on the ground around their home.
Eventually, the level of the earth in the streets slowly rose up around the home.

When people first built their home, it was level with the street.
But as the street level rises, they must make stairs to go down into the home.

When a house or a building became old and needing serious repair, the owner could just tear it down, leave the stones in a pile, and build the new home on top of the old foundation and stones.
Over a long period of time, little by little, the whole city slowly rose.

The same thing happened when an enemy army destroyed a city,
knocking down homes,
knocking down buildings,
knocking down walls.

Leaving the stones there, they build again on top of that mess.

So little by little the city becomes a hill.

Everyday Life in Bible Times
Chapter 5 – The Home and Its Furnishings

If that city became abandoned, dirt covered it.
Today, if you look at flat areas, you notice a hill. That is called a **tell**.
That is an old city under that dirt.

When people research buildings long ago, research life long ago, digging down through the layers, that is called **archeology**.

STUDY QUESTION

Read John 5:2

What was near the sheep market?

Lesson 5.14
City Walls and Gates

Long ago, if people living in cities felt afraid that an enemy army might come and beat them, they built a wall all around the city for protection.

The first wall could be large loose stones just piled around the city.

When King David built his city wall, he used large cut stones, neatly laid out in a straight wall that was thick and tall. That gave good protection. An enemy army could not go through that wall.

The people in the city closed the gate and they were protected.

So what did the army do? They waited. ...and waited. ...and waited.

In the city, everything was fine, but when food ran out, people became hungry, near death. So they gave up and they opened the gate. The army came in and beat them.

The city wall had several doors all around it.
Those doors were called **gates**.
Those doors made of wood, thick and heavy.

Every night, they closed those and bolted them.
On the wall, all around, soldiers stood watching, all day and all night.

Some walls had tall towers. The watchmen stood up in the towers to watch for enemies.

The wall around Jerusalem had many gates. Each gate had a name.
Names for those gates were from was taken from something important near that door.
For example:

One door was near the fish market. So that door was called the Fish Gate.
Another door was near the sheep market. So that door was called the Sheep Gate.

Everyday Life in Bible Times
Chapter 5 – The Home and Its Furnishings

One door near the water cistern. That door was called the Water Gate.

READ 2nd Kings 6:24-7:20

Read chapter 6 in *Everyday Life in Bible Times*.