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BIBLE MANNERS AND CUSTOMS

By

Edward A. Marshall, Ph. D., D. D.
Mrs. E. A. Marshall, B. A. E.


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THE TRACT EVANGEL SOCIETY,
INTRODUCTION

The close analogy between the physical and the spiritual was often seized upon by the Bible writers to make their utterances more graphic and convincing. They illustrated the unknown by known and sought to make divine truth real through human experiences.

I had not resided long in Palestine before being deeply impressed that a knowledge of the manners and customs of the people of Bible times was quite necessary to a well rounded understanding of the Scriptures. The study of them brought many a spiritual thrill.

After returning to America and lecturing on the subject, I was delighted to see the audiences manifest the same spiritual pleasure over the lessons which the customs reveal. In order that those who hear the lectures may have an aid in remembering the details, these studies on the Home Life are put in booklet form. It is hoped that this will give the lectures a wider usefulness.

THE AUTHOR

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By Edward A. Marshall, Ph. D., D. D. and Mrs. E. A. Marshall, B. A. E.

Dr. Marshall has been twice around the world visiting thirty countries.

He lived in Palestine and made an extensive study of the ancient Hebrew customs which are found in the Bible. He has lectured in two thousand cities in America. In illustrating his lectures, Dr. Marshall builds several sixteen foot pictures before the audience with a method so unique that it was given a patent by the United States Government.

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Dr. Wm. M. Anderson, pastor First Presbyterian church, Dallas, Texas, wrote: "You certainly made a host of friends in Dallas. We have not had a man visit us whose ministry was more happily received and we are ready to sign you up whenever you make another trip our way. We would like those same lectures over or any others which you believe would help."

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BIBLE CUSTOMS

When you think of studying Bible Customs you must prepare to enter a new world. Physically, people then were the same as your neighbors are now, but mentally they were different and you must throw your mental lever into "reverse" if you would travel their way and at their speed. When they met people they passed them on the left, we pass on the right; they read from right to left, we from left to right; they began at the back of the book, we at the front; they tossed their heads backward for "no," we shake our heads sideways; their men never shaved their faces while an unshaven man in America is a curiosity; their men kept their hats on in church while we take ours off.

Of course we say that Orientals are "back numbers" and "out of date" but they say they were here first and that we must not remove the "landmarks which the fathers have set." So we each go our own way trying to get the most out of life by our own programs.

However, in these days of awakening, many of them are adopting our methods of living while none of us are seeking theirs, which proves that our civilization is the winner. Instead of their slow donkeys, we move swiftly with our autos and aeroplanes; instead of a spark of light from a wick in a dish of oil, we flood our rooms from a Mazda bulb; instead of a handful of charcoal for warmth, we maintain a summer temperature in the coldest days by thermostat heaters; instead of drinking water from contaminated pools, we pipe tested water into our homes and then turn on the faucet.

We visit their country and pity them. We see their women still grinding at the mill; men reaping their harvests with sickles and threshing their scanty crops by the treading of oxen. We watch them eating their meals "out of hand" all dipping their fingers into the same dish, and then we take our boat for the homeland with a new cause for thanksgiving, convinced that one of the outstanding results of Christianity is a sanitary, wholesome civilization.
Customs Reveal People

The study of customs is always interesting because it is the study of people in action. What they do is the product of what they have long thought, until it has become a habit and received their mental permission to continue it through life. Therefore customs divulge the soul secrets of a people and reveal the character of the “dried withs” that bind them to the past and hold them to their future course. Customs are simply individual habits prolonged.

Forming Customs

When God said “Train up a child in the way he should go” He was showing how to form a child’s habits. Then when He concluded the verse saying, “And when he is old he will not depart from it,” He was showing how the habit would be turned into a custom. The Bible is a compendium of efforts showing how God has tried to mold the customs of mankind, and His judgments upon sin are His warnings that the customs practiced by those who were judged, were wrong.

When God said, “Thou shalt,” He was trying to introduce a good custom and when He said, “Thou shalt not,” He was trying to stop some evil practice before it became a custom, because bad customs must be “nipped in the bud” or they will chain a people in slavery for a thousand years.

Influence of Custom

When Jacob worked seven years to gain his beloved Rachel for a wife and found that Leah had been thrust upon him instead, he complained, but was immediately silenced by his father-in-law who justified his deception by saying, “Custom”; “It must not be so done in our country, to give the younger before the first born.”

During all the years Christ lived in Nazareth He attended the Synagogue on Sabbath. How do we know? Because Luke says, “He came to Nazareth where he had been brought up, and
as his custom was, he went into the Synagogue and stood up for to read." The word "custom" unlocks the secret. The great streams of His life work started their courses in His youth and had become His custom.

“Whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap” is simply custom out in the harvest field reaping the ripened products which grew from habits.

**Customs Not Changed in Palestine**

Palestine customs have changed but little in 3000 years. The reasons for the continuation of these oriental habits are many. People who were governed by patriarchal rule where the authority descended from father to son, were reluctant to admit changes. The adaptability of the customs to the climate and habits of the people had much to do with keeping them. Then the close relation between Hebrew and Arabic languages helped to maintain the same mental attitude in all the walks of life.

The rabbis said: “It is better to follow martyrdom than to change even the style of the shoe laces.”

The Talmud teaches, “Whoso hath his dwelling place in the land of Israel, and eateth his common food in cleanliness (i.e. with washed hands) and speaks the holy language (i.e. Hebrew), and recites his phylacteries morning and evening, let him be confident that he shall obtain the life in the world to come.”

**The Bible Could be Rewritten**

If the Bible had been rewritten fifty years ago its narratives could have been duplicated out of everyday life. In fact the lands of the Bible have been one of the best commentaries we have had for Bible interpretation. Women still grind at the mill and also call their husbands “lords” both of which must be hard on the feelings. The frail plows which were used to tickle the soil in Elijah’s day, now tickle the tourists too and make one inquire if the man who made the first plow dared call himself an inventor. Butter is still made in a goat skin turned outside in.
This assures the native that no civilized person will steal the product in the night after he has seen it made. Farmers walk barefooted to town carrying their shoes in their hands up to the city limits where the custom changes and they put on city airs.

Palestine Homes

The native homes of Bible lands have not changed. The material is of three kinds. Dhohe mud-bricks in the valleys and rough quarry stone or hewn stone in the hills. The architects who planned the houses 3000 years ago could still draw royalty from builders because they have not improved them even with floors or bedrooms.

Thieves Still the Same

Thieves can still dig through the soft walls of the dhohe mud houses and steal as Christ said: “Lay not up for yourselves treasure on earth where * * thieves dig through and steal.” (Matt. 6:19) He exposed two thieves, the one who stole from his neighbor and the other who stole from two parties, God and himself.

Job revealed a new method used by thieves in 24:16. “In the dark they dig through houses which they have marked for themselves in the daytime.” It is said that the thieves marked the houses of the rich with balsam in the daytime so that they could tell by the smell of the balsam which houses they wished to rob at night.

Exalting the Gate

A significant remark occurs in Prov. 17:19. “He that exalteth his gate seeketh destruction.” Anyone who tried to make a show of wealth at his gate would be in danger of evil from two sources. First, the merciless tax-collector would raise his taxes. Second, when any invading army captured a city they destroyed the best houses first, hoping thereby to get the most influential citizens. It is also said that in the early days the Jews of Rama built their doors only half height because the Arabs had the
habit of riding their horses through the doors and demanding money.

The Divided House

When Christ said, "A house divided against itself cannot stand but hath an end," He was using ABC language to His native audience. The mud walls of the houses become softened by the winter rains. Then, when the hot sirrocco winds come on in April or May the walls dry out too quickly and the owner suddenly finds his wall cracked from top to bottom. He knows there is no way to draw the soft walls together again so he voices Christ's words and tells the family that the house "cannot stand" and that they must move. That was Christ's first warning to the Jews about the condition of their national home.

If the man does not move when he sees the wall damaged something worse will happen. The roof rests on the walls so that when the walls weaken the roof sags. Then the rains come and fill the dirt on the roof with moisture which makes it abnormally heavy. Soon the crash comes. Roof and walls collapse together and Christ's next picture comes true, "Your house is left unto you desolate." More than one family which failed to move at the first warning has been crushed in the debris amid the darkness of a stormy night. In fact, a German writer relates that in 1900 A.D. twenty-five houses collapsed in Nazareth in a wild rain storm. This was Christ's second warning to the Jews and it came true at the destruction of Jerusalem when their whole national institutions collapsed making their desolation ever since pathetic.

Grass on the Housetop

Since the dirt used on the housetops came from the fields it contained grass seed which sprouted when the fall rains began. But its progress was soon checked so that it merely covered the roof with a fuzz, like our buffalo grass. This illustration of stunted growth caught the spirit of justice in the Psalmist who
exclaimed concerning his tormentors, "Let them be as the grass
upon the housetops, which withereth afore it growth up; where-
with the mower filleth not his hand: nor he that bindeth sheaves
his bosom." Ps. 129:6, 7.

Uses for the Roof

In summer the flat roofs were indispensable. There the
people visited, played and slept, which fact was like a cross-word
puzzle to one American youth who asked his Sunday School
teacher, "How did the people stick on?" He had probably tried to
scale the steep roof of his own home and wondered how a person
asleep on a Palestine roof could maintain his poise.

The "Road of the Roofs"

The roofs being flat and the houses joining one another ex-
plains Christ's urgent plea to people who might be on the housetop
when it would be announced that the armies of Titus had
reached Mount Scopus. Christ said let the people not come down
but flee to the mountains. He referred to the "road of the roofs." They were to run from one roof to another till they came to the
edge of the city when they could drop to the ground and escape.
The urgency of His plea becomes tragic when we learn that men
were not allowed upon other roofs than their own. Yea, a man
risks his life today if he approaches where he can see the women
in the court of a Mohammedan house.

To dwell in the corner of a housetop meant to live a sad,
lonely life in poverty. Yet Solomon said, "It is better to dwell
in the corner of a housetop, than with a brawling woman in a
wide house." He had seven hundred wives and three hundred
concubines, so probably there was one of the number whom he had
in mind as he wrote, though he modestly refrained from mention-
ing her name.

The Door

The door was a place of great importance. Houses had only
one entrance. When Christ said, "I am the door" the people understood the exclusiveness of His claim. This one door was the only legitimate entrance to the house. Any one who tried to get in by some other means showed that he was a thief and did not have honest motives. When Jesus said, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock," He demonstrated that He was not only at the legitimate place of entrance but that He was endeavoring to gain admission in the legitimate way.

The Doorkeeper

Homes of the wealthy had doorkeepers who were servants with much responsibility. When David said he would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of God than dwell in the tents of wickedness, he solemnly dedicated himself to spiritual service. The Tabernacle doorkeeper had a very exacting task for he was responsible before God and the people for all who came into the place of worship. Yet David chose it rather than the freedom of the Bedouin in whose tents he had often observed their carefree life. Psalm 84:10.

The Voice at the Door.

Another distinct Orientalism in this passage is Christ's remark, "If any man hear my voice." When the people within hear the guest knocking they call "Who?" If the visitor is known to the family he does not tell them his name but simply responds, "I." It is then an evidence of friendship when those inside recognize him by his voice and open the door at once. The tone of his voice is enough. If he has to tell them his name he feels hurt because they did not recognize him. (Acts 12:31). Jesus feels hurt too, when His children do not recognize His call for no one has a call like His.

Windows

Windows were not very popular in early Palestine. In fact many houses had none. William Ewing, once a missionary
there, stayed one night in a house which was very close and stuffy. “Why don’t you have a window in the wall?” he asked the wife. The woman held up her hands in amazement and exclaimed, “What! and help the robbers.” It was in this type of house that the woman lived who lost the coin and had to light a candle to find it.

Thieves frightened the people from having windows in the front of the lower floor. These windows were therefore placed in the inner court. On the second floor, out of the reach of robbers, large balcony windows projected over the street and furnished a delightful resting place and observatory for the ladies of leisure. David’s wife, Michael, sat here and observed her husband dancing before the advancing ark which was being brought up from the house of Obed Edom to the Tabernacle in the city of David. Jezebel, from this observatory, called to the new king, Jehu, who had just killed her son Jehoram, and said, “Had Zimri peace who slew his master?” Zimri was king only seven days when he committed suicide by burning his palace. I Kings 16:15.

Cisterns

On account of the scarcity of water, every well equipped home had a cistern and people drank rain water. Sometimes the cisterns cracked and the water leaked out. God chided the Jews for building leaky cisterns and implied that they were like their cisterns because as fast as He taught them His truth they let it leak out of their minds.

The Rooms

Many of the homes had only one room, and were literally one room apartments. The room consisted of the bed room, dining room, kitchen and parlor, all in one. When the man in Christ’s parable gave as the excuse for not helping his neighbor that his children were with him in bed (Lu. 11:7) he brought out the best reason he could find for they were all sleeping in the kitchen. He could not go to the ice box or cupboard and make up a few
sandwiches because Orientals keep no ready prepared food on hand. The whole family would be disturbed and he was not willing to go to so much trouble. Then Christ showed how His Father was glad to go to any amount of trouble for His children.

The attitude of the Mohammedans is still more pronounced than that of the Jews, for it is a disgrace and misfortune to awaken a Moslem Master when he is asleep. They believe that when they fall asleep at night the spirit leaves the body and goes sauntering through the world. In the morning the spirit returns, re-enters the body and the man goes about his work. If you awaken him before his spirit has returned he must wander around until his spirit arrives and he is in a terrible predicament.

Keys

Yale locks were never known in Bible times. The key to the home I rented in Jerusalem was a huge iron bar and I never liked to carry it unless I could wear my overcoat, as it fitted no other pocket. In olden times keys were of wood. Those for the homes were about eighteen inches long and those for the city gates were two feet. If a man had several, he tied them together with a string and carried them over his shoulder which was an ensign of wealth and authority.

In Isaiah 22:22 and in Rev. 3:7 there is an interesting prophecy concerning Christ. "And the keys of the house of David will I lay upon his shoulder: so he shall open and none shall shut; and he shall shut and none shall open." Among the Jews the master of the house controlled the keys and the opening and closing of the street doors was his prerogative.

Key of Knowledge

When the rabbis received their ordination, a key was given them as a symbol indicating that they were authorized to unlock the treasures of wisdom and knowledge to their people, but Christ exposed their sham in Luke 11:52 when He said: "Woe unto you, lawyers! for ye have taken away the key of knowledge: ye enter
not in yourselves and them that are entering in ye hindered." They were hiding the key to the kingdom of God while the people were anxiously waiting to enter. Christ then gave them ample time to repent to prove themselves. Then, just before He left, He transferred the keys and the authority to Peter with the full commission claimed by the lawyers. Said He, "And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."

HOSPITALITY

In the East, hospitality exceeds all other virtues. As a stranger approaches a village, the householder who sees him first claims him as his guest. He bows low, insists that he enter his home. There he becomes the servant of his guest, loads him with food and courtesies and when he departs the host refuses all pay and then accompanies his guest for some distance where he pauses and watches till he has disappeared from view. Compare that with American hospitality in the average city or in the hotel where they charge you for meals you missed.

Jewish Hospitality

The rabbis usually spread flattery on pretty thick when they described Jewish hospitality of Bible times. Perhaps they did so to offset their practice of sharp bargaining and their reputation for trickery. Rabbi Hanna, it is said, opened his door when a meal was ready and said, "Anyone who is hungry may come in and eat." The Rabbis declared that Job had forty tables spread at all times for strangers and ten for widows and the legend pictured him as having a door on each side of the house so that strangers coming from any direction could walk right in.

"One who shows hospitality to a student of the law is regarded as if he had offered the evening sacrifice."

The house was considered a sanctuary and the father a priest,
the table was the table of the Lord; every stranger was an invited guest and he was lord of the house while a guest.

The rabbis said that “Paradise is to be the reward of willing hospitality.” “A house without a guest is a house without a blessing.”

Solomon’s appeal, “Cast thy bread upon the waters: for thou shalt find it after many days,” is echoed in the native proverb, “Today he is our guest: someday we may be his.”

The guest was supposed to bring plenty of news and tell it all to the family in return for his entertainment.

In spite of all this show of hospitality Christ almost took their breath when He called the Samaritan a “neighbor,” and his words to His disciples, “all ye are brethren” began a union of which Hillel and Shammasi never dreamed.

Constraining Guests

One day a sheik seized the bridle of our horse as we were passing his tent and insisted that we tarry while he kill a sheep and make us a feast. It reminded us of the time when Christ told of the master of the house who said to his servants, “Go ye out into the highways and hedges and compel them to come in.”

The “certain Pharisee” in Luke 11:37 who invited Christ into his home to dine, committed a great breach of etiquette, if his purpose is revealed in verses 53-54: “Laying in wait for him and seeking to catch something out of his mouth that they might accuse him.” No self respecting Jew would try to trap his guest in so underhanded a manner.

Cannon Tristram was once dining with an Arab. His servant came behind him and whispered, “Trust him not: he has not kissed thee on either cheek.” The servant’s warning soon proved to be true.

The Bedouin Trick

Robinson tells of buying a goat from some Bedouin they passed. The Bedouin guessed that the goat was to be eaten by the
Robinson party. About supper time they hove over the hill. Courtesy demanded that they be invited to dine and to be fed first as the guests were to be given the best portions. The "chief guide," who played host fared worst of all for he lost his entire dinner and had to beg a biscuit. The Bedouin had eaten the goat he sold.

Druse Hospitality

A rebel from Damascus took shelter in the tent of a Druse. The Emee demanded that the Druse surrender him. The Druse sheik replied, "When have you known a Druse to give up his guest?" "Tell the Emee that as long as Talhouk shall preserve his beard, not a hair of his guest shall fall." The Emee cut down fifty mulberry trees a day to compel the surrender. After he had cut down 1000 trees the guest fled away ashamed, but the Druse did not give up his guest.

One Bedouin who refused food to a stranger could not again win the respect of his neighbors. He had committed a serious offense against both Divine and human law.

Hospitality was so ingrained in Oriental thinking that it became a feature of religion. The dependence of Orientals on each other prevented any man from living in an isolated home, or a separate life, as it was not safe. Sharing food and drink among Orientals is a symbol of covenanting. When Christ said to the woman of Samaria, "Give me to drink," He was using the oriental method of asking for friendship as well as water. The woman evidently understood it so because she seemed to overlook giving Christ a drink and went to get the men to decide about giving Christ the friendship.

Sabbath Feasting

The rabbis taught that "an Israelite must eat and drink more on Sabbath than on ordinary days," and, if necessary, they must economize all week in order to be able to do it. One must even borrow money in order to have enough for the Sabbath feasts.
For these feasts, fish and wine must be had in addition to the usual meat. But fish may be dispensed with if the Gentile price is too high, “for Christians purposely raised the price of fish on Jewish feasts, out of spite.”

**Presents**

In Sam. 9:17, Saul, as a boy, was up to date on rules of social etiquette, for he objected to their going to meet the prophet Samuel without a present. It was an offence for a person to visit a prominent official without a gift. One man who was greatly embarrassed before an officer because he had no present for him, suddenly ran to a pond of water, filled both his hands and hastened to present it to his master. This attitude of mind must have often caused people to contribute to Christ after He became prominent, and no doubt Judas was on hand to take the presents.

**Religion at Home**

No nation ever gave its children such remarkable religious training as did the Jews. From the child’s first waking moment until it fell asleep at night he was surrounded by manifestations of religious conviction. His father, on arising, put on his turban immediately because he believed he was in the presence of the Shekinah. As he dressed with his fringed garments and washed for purification he said fitting prayers about being cleansed from defilement and clothed with the righteousness of God. Matt. 15:37, 41. Then he put on his phylacteries and read the Torah (Law of Moses) surrounded by his family. At meals he said prayers and gave thanks. Perhaps at nine o’clock he repaired to the Synagogue for public prayer and the reading of the Scriptures. Sometime during the day he gave instruction to the boys in the family, teaching them to read Hebrew from the book of Leviticus. At evening time the mother lighted the Hanukah lamp and looked at the reflection of the light on her finger nails with superstitious interest, hoping to find indication of prosperity for the coming week.
The Mezuza

As each person left or entered the home the boy saw them touch the Mezuza at the door. During the Feast of Tabernacles he slept in a booth on the roof in memory of the time when his forefathers were pilgrims in the wilderness. He saw the festival illuminations in the home in midwinter and attended the feast of Esther, or the Spring Purim, and had a merrymaking, boisterous time. Even now boys write the name of Haman on the soles of their feet and when his name is pronounced in the public reading of Esther they stomp on the floor to indicate that they are trampling Haman underfoot. On Passover week the boys helped search the house for leaven which had to be put away.

Religion Seen Everywhere

During the day, even in busy places, religion was in evidence. Covenants, oaths and vows were mingled with common conversation. Pharisees prayed on the street corner, and scribes, often in secluded places, taught the traditions of the elders to the passers by. Tithes were collected and alms were distributed. Everything was related to religion so that the Jewish boy grew up thinking religion as he thought of food, school and business.

Religion everywhere commanded respect and reverence. He watched the scribes receive salutations in the market place and saw people step aside in the crowded street to let the High Priest pass to the Temple terrace. Thus the Jewish boy breathed religion as he breathed air.

The Blood Covenant

The blood covenant which was so commonly understood among Oriental people shows a possibility of the union of Divine life with the human. We are familiar with the medical practice of blood transfusion and how the life of one person becomes the physical salvation of another who receives his blood into his veins. Christ showed how we receive His Divine life in the same way, except that instead of having His blood injected into our veins by
means of a hypodermic needle, He said, “Whoso eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood hath eternal life and I will raise him up at the last day.” John 6:54. But his hearers did not understand the law of the transmission of spiritual life. They stumbled over the word “eateth” and said, “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?” Then Christ explained that He was speaking of the spiritual life for the spiritual nature. Said He, “It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you they are spirit and they are life.” John 6:63. He used the word “eateth” as it was the only way they understood that people could get things into their systems but He showed later that He meant spiritual eating. It is just as necessary to eat spiritually to get eternal life as it is to eat physically to get bodily life. We eat spiritually by reading the Bible and by meditation on its truths. By this means the Holy Spirit makes us partakers of the Divine nature. This covenant of blood throughout the nations is considered a closer relationship and more binding than the natural tie of family kinship. The tie in Christ is closer than the “brotherhood of man” in Adam.

The Threshold Covenant

In Syria and in Egypt when a guest worthy of special honor was welcomed to a home, the blood of a sacrificed animal was shed on the threshold of that home as a means of adopting the newcomer into the family or making a covenant union with him. While the guest was still outside, the host took the lamb or goat and laid it upon the threshold of his door. It was then slain and the blood ran out on the threshold. The animal was then removed and the guest stepped over the blood across the threshold and by this act he became as it were a member of the family by the threshold covenant.

General Grant in Egypt

General Grant, at Assiout, Egypt, was welcomed by a blood covenant. A bullock was sacrificed at the steamer. The head of
the animal was placed on one side of the gang plank and the body on the other and the blood flowed between them under the plank so that General Grant, in stepping from the steamer would cross over it. When he reached the house of the vice-consul, a sheep had been similarly sacrificed at the threshold in such a way that he passed over the blood on entering. The act of stepping over the blood on entering the house united him with the family.

Despising the Blood Covenant

In this covenant no indignity could equal that of the guest trampling upon the threshold. In Zeph. 1:9 God says, “In the same day will I punish all those that leap on the threshold.” Paul in Heb. 10:28, 29 evidently refers to this custom when he says, “He that despised Moses’ law died without mercy under two or three witnesses: of how much sorrier punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden underfoot the Son of God, and counted the blood of the covenant wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace.”

The Prodigal Son

When the prodigal son was outfitted at home, on his return from his tour in the far country, he was dressed like a man of wealth and influence. The object was not simply to cover his nakedness and shame but to make him a highly respected gentlemen. The “best robe” was the long, wide, loose upper garment which the scribes loved to wear to give them a high standing in the market place. Artists who have never been in Palestine or made a study of oriental dress often make amusing mistakes in their coloring. Many of them picture the father of the prodigal coming to meet his son wearing a red garment. Women alone wore red. So the artists picture the father coming to meet his son wearing his wife’s mantle which is not only humiliating but ridiculous to an Oriental.
Shoes and Sandals

The “shoes” were high shoes, not sandals, and were worn only by freeman and never by slaves or servants. The shoes were of soft leather while the sandals were hard. They bore the same relation to each other that our dress shoe does to a plow shoe.

Shoes were not subjects of conversation in polite society. Carrying the Master’s shoes was the work of the lowest servants or slaves. When the Pharisees asked John the Baptist if he was the Messiah, John quickly and finally corrected their impression by saying, “One mightier than I cometh, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose.” In other words, John said, “As compared with Christ, I am lower than the lowest slave.” John had the vision of Christ as God.

The Ring of Distinction

The prodigal’s “ring” was an emblem of his restoration to position and power. It was the proof of social rank like the armoreal bearings of Europe. None of these marks of distinction were attained or in any way secured by the prodigal son himself. As he beheld his transformed appearance he could realize that he had nothing in himself and that everything he saw was the gift of his forgiving, reconciled father.

Women

Jewish women of Bible times had more freedom and esteem than any other women of the world. Early Roman women were little better than slaves; Hindu wives lived behind the purdah; Mohammedan women now wear the veil and live in the harem; Latin devout women go to the convent; Korean women did not even have a name and the Brahman women were told that they had no souls. In China when the Emperor died his wives were removed to a place called the “Palace of Chastity” where they were shut up for the rest of their lives. Mohammed treated his women in the same way.
The Oriental Veil

Jewish women of rank wore veils especially if married. Gen. 24:65. When Abimelech found Sarah was married he gave her a hint that she and all her women folks ought to wear veils and that he had given her husband enough money to buy them. Gen. 20:16. Oriental husbands sometimes tried to persuade their wives to do something by saying as one husband did, "Do this and I will buy you a gold veil."

Paul endeavored to exalt women. In Gal. 3:28 he says, "There is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus." But the ritualistic rabbis of his day put woman far below her lordly husband.

A woman once asked Rabbi Eliezer a question of science. He replied: "No other wisdom is becoming in a woman than that of the distaff." Other rabbis said, "He who teaches his daughter the law teaches immorality." "Let the law be burned rather than entrust it to a woman."

Mohammedan Women

One cannot insult a Mohammedan more than to ask about the health of his wife. If a woman is mentioned, the men are apt to say, "Ajellak Allah." "May God elevate you above such a contaminating subject." The same word is used after a person speaks about a dog, pig, donkey or a shoe which are held to be unclean. A strict Mohammedan, when absent, does not write to his wife but to his son though he may be a babe. When he is compelled to speak of his wife he prefaces his remark by, "I beg your pardon."

The Syrian thinks an American or European husband loses all his manhood because of his deference to his wife. Such comments as this may be heard. "An affrangée (European) is quite a man until his wife whispers something to him. Then he becomes her slave; he does just what she tells him."
Woman's Inheritance

Among the Jews a woman did not inherit her husband's property if he had sons. In the case of the widow, Ruth, since she had no sons she sought an husband to redeem her deceased husband's property. In Numb. 27:7 Zelophehad's daughters were given the inheritance of their father because there were no sons but it was a custom at one time that if a man married such a daughter he changed his name to hers so the inheritance would not go out of the father's family.

The Bride's Dowery

A Jewish father received a certain amount from a son-in-law who married his daughter. He was supposed to keep this money and give it to his daughter if her husband died, which explains the complaint Jacob's wives had against their father Laban. They said, "He hath sold us and quite devoured our money." Gen. 31:15. He was evidently a poor manager or he may have wished to get even with Jacob for taking so much of his property with him when he fled.

A Cruel Custom

Ezekiel mentions a cruel custom which was in vogue among Persians and Chaldeans and which God said they would practice against the Jews if they captured them. Ezek. 23:25, "They shall take away thy nose and thine ears." This custom is still practiced in parts of Africa. If a man becomes angry at his wife and she refuses to do his bidding he cuts off her nose and perhaps her ears.

In Isaiah 3, there is a whole group of customs practiced by the Jewish women who wished to follow the fashions and which the prophet said was the cause of their spiritual downfall. Jezebel is said to have set the pace for face painting. There is a Jewish saying which reads, "Jezebel put her eyes out in painting," which is an Oriental expression for overdoing a thing.
Christ Exalted Woman.

It is interesting to note the change which occurred in the lives and treatment of women after Christ came. The moral atmosphere brightened. Godly women came upon the scene and were examples of lofty thinking, spiritual devotion and abounding hospitality, such as Mary, Elizabeth, Anna, Dorcas, Lydia, Phoebe, Eunice, Lois, and Priscilla, all of whom lived sweet moral lives far above Pharisaic formalism.

When Mary broke the alabaster box to anoint Christ for His burial, Judas, who was well posted in values, estimated that it was worth $60, which was a whole year's wages for a laborer.

Anna fasted and prayed and was permitted to see Jesus in the Temple while the Pharisees fasted and prayed and did not even secure salvation, which shows the immense difference in heart motives and that God honored spiritual honesty in women more than religious formality even in the Temple teachers.

Clothing

People in Bible times were governed in their costumes much the same as people are today. Three things guided their choice. Personal taste in material and color; the place they desired to hold in the public mind and their pocket books. Josephus says that Solomon dressed in white, so did the Essens.

The Priest's Robe

In the Temple, God gave them no example of cheap clothing. The priest's robe cost $125.00 and was usually worn only one year when it was cut up and used for wicks in the oil lamps of the Temple. They were robes of glory and beauty in keeping with the worship they were to give unto God. They were woven without seam. This had a marked effect on the dress of the people when they went into the Temple or the Synagogue. They had a rule that no one should come into the Synagogue with an unclean body or clothes.
When Christ came into the world He dressed in simple attire as an ordinary citizen. Dr. Edersheim gives a description of His clothing which is herewith presented from Vol. 1, page 624.

The Clothing of Christ

"We can now form an approximate idea of the outward appearance of Jesus on that spring-morning amidst the throng in Capernaum. He would, we may safely assume, go about in the ordinary, although not the more ostentatious, dress, worn by the Jewish teachers of Galilee. Head-gear would probably be the Sudar, a kerchief twisted into kind of a turban, or perhaps the Maaphoreth, which seems to have served as a covering for the head, and to have descended over the back of the neck and shoulders, somewhat like the Indian pugree. His feet were probably shod with sandals. The Chaluq, or more probably the Kittuna, which formed His inner garment, must have been close fitting, and descended to the feet, since it was not only worn by teachers, but was regarded as absolutely necessary for anyone who would publicly read or 'Targum' (translate) the Scriptures, or exercise any function in the Synagogue. As we know it was without seam, woven from the top throughout; and this accords with the texture of these garments. Round the middle it would be fastened with a girdle. Over this inner, He would probably wear the square outer garment, or Tallith, with the ordinary fringes of four long white threads with one of hyacinth knotted together on each of the four corners."

The Hem of the Garment

When the woman came in the crowd at Capernaum to get healing from Christ she came behind Him, so as to be unobserved, and touched the "border of His garment" which was probably the long zizith which hung from one of the corners of the tallith, as it was considered the most sacred part of one's garments and the Jew was required to wear them. Numb. 15:38;41. This was that they might remember Jehovah's commands.
Rending the Garment

Rending the garment was a custom showing great mental agitation in grief, sorrow or anger. With a knife the mourner cut a place on the edge of the tunic or inner garment and then tore it three or four inches. II Sam. 13:31; Joel 2:3. On ordinary occasions the rent could be sewed up in thirty days except when mourning for a father or mother. At Christ’s trial the High Priest rent his garment because he said Christ had spoken blasphemy. Matt. 26:65. According to Jewish custom the High Priest could not sew up this rent. The rending of the garment was done also when any member of the family became an apostate.

Significant Customs

Shaking out the lap (Neh. 5:13), shaking off the dust of the feet (Matt. 6:11; Lu. 10:11; Acts 13:51) and washing the hands (John 13:5) all imply abandonment to judgment. This is true also of “casting away the garment” (Acts 22:23, Comp. Rom. 13:12).

Exchanging clothes between the opposite sexes was an idolatrous practice and was forbidden, (Deut. 22:5) while exchanging garments among acquaintances of the same sex meant friendship, (I Sam. 18:4). Presenting a garment or girdle showed great confidence and affection and in some cases constituted an act of adoption. II Kings 5:5; Gen. 45:22. Spreading the garments in the highway or path meant great homage to a superior. Matt. 21:8; Rom. 13:12.

Washing

Jewish tradition intimates that David inaugurated the custom of ceremonial washing when he said: “I will wash my hands in innocency: so will I compass thine altar, O Lord.” Ps. 26:6.

Washing hands was used as a sign of innocency by Pilate at the trial of Christ, (Matt. 27:24) but it had no power to remove the guilt even though the criminal washed with nitre and much soap. Jer. 2:22.
When Job wished to speak of the utmost cleanliness he spoke of washing in snow water because it was supposed to possess superior qualities for cleansing and brightening the skin and for the prevention of perspiration by contracting the fibers. Job 9:30.

Importance of the Custom

In the time of Christ, the rulers for ceremonial washing had grown to be very elaborate and burdensome. The custom became imperative because of the reasons which lay back of it, such as the following tradition:

"Whosoever sleepeth at night in his bed tasteth of death for his soul leaveth for the nonce. Being thus bereft of his soul, an unclean spirit possesseth his body and defileth it. Wherefore let no man pass his (unwashed) hand over his eyes in the morning by reason of the unclean spirit which resteth upon it."

Extremists declared, "if a man walks four yards from his bed in the morning without ablution, he incurs the penalty of death." Thus the Sanhedrin felt justified in putting a stone on the coffin of those who died and had not practiced ceremonial washing, for they said, "He who does not wash his hands before eating as the rabbis ordained, will be transmitted into a cataract where he will have no rest."

John Wesley said that cleanliness was next to godliness but the rabbis thought that cleanliness was godliness itself.

Since the rabbis had committed themselves to such teaching it is no wonder they thought Christ a trouble maker from their point of view and tried to get Him out of the way before He destroyed their hold on the people.

Christ often tried to show them where they were wrong but His warnings fell on deaf ears. On one occasion, some of the Jerusalem scribes, who had followed Him to Galilee, complained that His disciples ate with "unwashed hands." Christ laid their whole case bare and called upon Isaiah to corroborate His statement. Mark 7:6-9, "Well hath Esaias prophesied of you hypocrites, as it is written, This people honoreth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. Howbeit in vain do they worship
me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. For laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold the tradition of men, as the washing of pots and cups: and many other such like things ye do. And he said unto them, Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition. * * *Making the word of God of none effect through your tradition which ye have delivered."

Rabbis Invent Traditions

In order to increase the convincing power of their ceremonials they developed a line of "traditions" to prove their position. They said that the seventy-two elders who translated the Scriptures for Ptolemy washed their hands in the sea every morning before saying prayers. For this reason it became a custom to build houses of worship near a stream or pond. Acts 16:13. Some washing customs passed over into the church. Both Eusebius and Chrysostom make frequent allusions to them.

Rules for Washing Hands

Much discussion arose over "external correctness" in the washing of hands; as to what vessels could be employed; what kind of water could be used and who should pour it (pouring the water was the work of a disciple); whether the person who washed should hold his hands with the palms up or down and whether he should wash as far as the knuckles or only the tips of the fingers. One of the decisions made was, "On washing before meals the hands should be raised; on washing after meals the hands should be lowered."

Some of the rules laid down were very trivial. "The water must be such as a dog would drink, the amount must be equal to that which could be contained in an egg shell and a half; it must not be poured over a broken place in the pitcher, and after it passes over the hands it must be caught in a vessel. The right hand must be washed first and then the left, keeping the fingers separate, and the person washing must dry his hands before he could walk
twenty-two steps or else he must wash all over again. He must say a benediction and have it finished before his hands have become dry.

Moab Belittled

When David said “Moab is my washpot” (Ps. 60:8) he put the Moabites in contempt. The washpot was the vessel used to catch the wash water from the hands and was therefore a vessel in disgrace. It is said also to have been the vessel used by conquerors for washing their feet which made the Jew scorn any association with it.

Christ Explains the Half-Washed Platter

Touching an unclean dish caused the hands to be unclean, so when Christ said, “Ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess,” He showed that they were not concerned about the sanitary cleanliness of the dish but were anxious about the part that effected their ceremonial defilement. In other words they were more interested in the outward show than in the preparation of the heart. Matt. 23:25.

Washing with the Fist

When Christ went to dine with the Pharisee it says they “marveled that he had not first washed before dinner.” (Lu. 11:38). This washing was the ceremonial washing “with the fist” and not the hand, and was a ritual act. Two applications or pourings had to be made. The first was to wash away the defilement and the second application was to wash away the residue of the first water that had washed away the defilement, in other words the second was the rinsing water.

Poisoned Water

The rabbis said that when a person died, all the water must be emptied from all the vessels in the house because the angel
of death might have dropped some of the deadly venom into some of the drinking water. It was said that one rabbi died from drinking water thus poisoned.

Washing, a Tradition

The Bible distinctly calls the ceremonial washing the "tradition of the elders" (Matt. 15:2) which clears the Scriptures from any responsibility in such teaching. The serious part of the custom was not in the many washings but because they were made a meritorious part of their religion. The washings themselves were very beneficial under the conditions of the times and doubtless tended to prolong life by cleanliness.

Eating

The Oriental method of eating is to have the cooked food in a common dish around which the men gathered. They sat cross-legged and helped themselves with their fingers. Thus Christ said, "He that dippeth his hand with me in the dish, the same shall betray me." Matt. 26:23.

Greek Tables

After the exile, the Jews adopted the Greek method of reclining at the table which was built in the shape of the Greek letter Πι. This is believed to have been the kind of table used at the last supper. Lu. 22:21, "The hand of him that betrayeth me is with me on the table."

A rabbi said, referring to the Greek table custom, "We are bound to eat lying along as kings and great men do because it is the token of liberty." This was the table referred to when Jesus gave some wholesome advice to the ambitious guests at the Pharisee's banquet. Said He, "When thou art bidden go and sit down in the lowest room: that when he that bade thee cometh, he may say unto thee, Friend, go up higher: then thou shalt have worship in the presence of them that sit at meat with thee." Luke 14:10

The table at the end was the "highest," and the place of honor.
Woman Washes Christ's Feet

In Luke 7:36-50 there is the account of the woman washing Christ's feet. Some think she was out of place. Not in God's plan. People in those days were permitted to enter the banquet room, though not invited, and to listen to the conversation of the guests. Those who were eating rested on divans which brought their feet to the outer edge where they were easily accessible for washing. All sandals and shoes were removed on entering the room so the divans would not be soiled. These facts show that every condition was made ready for the woman's task. The fact that no one questioned the propriety of the act shows it was in keeping with the custom of the times.

Millstone

Nothing in woman's life in America equals the strenuous work of turning the millstone in Palestine, except perhaps using the old fashioned washboard. The millstone was so indispensable in Jewish homes that it could not be taken away even as a pledge for borrowing money. God knew the cupidity of the money lenders and also the necessity of the housewife having the millstone in preparing food so He put it on the exempt list along with the Abba and the widow's clothing. Duet. 24:6, 12, 13, 17.

Palestine women were as familiar with the millstone as American women are with the broom and one Palestine woman used a broken piece of an old stone with which to kill a judge who was fighting her people. He was pressing up with his army to capture the tower of Thebez and she was on the tower. Times were exciting. The capture of the tower seemed certain, when she met the crisis, seized the stone, threw it upon Judge Abimelech's head and cracked his skull. He knew his fighting days were over and he called hastily to his armour-bearer saying, "Slay me, that man say not of me, A woman slew me." He wanted to keep the scandal out of the history books but the news reporter put it in. Jud. 9:53; II Sam. 11:21.

The most durable millstones came from the country east of
the sea of Galilee where there had once been a volcanic disturbance which threw up a quantity of basaltic rock. This rock was very hard and was much prized for making millstones though they were difficult to transport to Jerusalem. Christ one day used this familiar object as an illustration to impress the disciples with the importance of the salvation of children, for they did not take to children’s work well. To them, it did not seem important enough. Working big miracles was more to their taste. So Christ tried to tell them the value of faith even in little children by saying, “But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea.” Christ showed that there was only one cord that bound people to Him and that cord was “faith.” If anyone tried to sever that cord by making fun of faith he was guilty of trying to commit spiritual murder and that it would be better for that person if he were drowned in the sea. Christ knew that children could have saving faith in Him and He knew how plastic their minds were and how easily they could be misled. Let anyone who makes light of children’s work take this warning.

Bread

Bread was the chief article of food, barley for the poor and wheat for the well-to-do. The two kinds of wheat of the Old Testament are shown in two passages. The finest wheat was ordered by Abraham for his angel guest (Gen. 18:6) and the coarser variety is mentioned in I Kings 17:4 as the kind in the barrel of the widow of Zerephath, which was in keeping with her poverty.

The leaven used in making bread metaphorically represented evil which caused Christ to use it in Matt. 16:6, “Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees.” Compare verses 11 and 12.

Bake Ovens

Baking was done in ovens built of stone which were heated
with grass fire after which the ashes were raked out and the cakes of dough bake upon the hot rocks, first one side and then the other. If the baker neglected to turn them they were "half baked" to which condition God alluded when He said, "Ephraim is a cake not turned." Hos. 7:8.

Hosea pictured Israel as a drunken baker who starts the baking and then falls asleep and lets the cakes burn to a crisp. Chapter 7.

In Lev. 26:26 a famine condition is pictured when "ten women shall bake their bread in one oven." Each woman provided fuel for one day and on the day she furnished the fuel she had to bake her bread last which was a simple method of compelling enough heat for the entire baking.

Public bakers were common but the orthodox Jew had to watch whom he patronized as the following caution shows. "All Jews who send their bread to a Gentile or to a Jew who desecrates the Sabbath, should see that an Israelite throws a piece of wood into the furnace, or that he should place the bread in the oven, for it is then the baking of a Jew, and lawful."

**Grace at Meals**

The duty of saying Grace at meals was derived from Deut. 8:10. "Thou shalt eat ** and bless the Lord thy God." Strenuous debates were held over food containing vegetables, fruit and honey, as to what blessing should be said because different blessings were used with different foods. The most exacting rules were laid down in connection with eating. "After one has said the benediction over a meal he should not speak a word until he has eaten a piece the size of an olive and there should be no lapse of time between."

Men and boys sat cross-legged on the floor while the women brought the food. They had bread, dates, figs, olives, milk and cheese. They used a flat loaf of bread in place of a plate and broke off a three cornered piece of bread to serve as a spoon. During the meal they managed to eat both the spoon and the
plate. Then they licked their fingers which was "washing the table cutlery" and the meal was over. It was the simple life.

The Eating Covenant

When Christ told the disciples to "Gather up the fragments that nothing be lost" (John 6:12) He was in perfect harmony with the sentiments of the country. Wasting bread was considered a sin.

Eating with another sometimes constituted a covenant. That is probably why the Jews refrained from eating with Gentiles. One rabbi said, "He who eats with an idolator is like one who eats with a dog."

That is where Joshua was entrapped by the Gibeonites for he and his elders ate some of the moldy bread which the Gibeonites had brought before they took the trouble to verify their claims about where they came from.

Christ chose this covenant custom at the last supper to show Judas that He was holding no grudge against him because of his thievery.

The rabbis were generous in their wholesome advice to guests, but they often put their advice in cloaked phrases. Instead of saying, "Do not criticise your host" they said, "Do not throw a stone into the spring from which you have just drunk."

Drinking together as well as eating together had its binding tie. Both sacred and profane authors say that a man's cup signifies the portion that befalls him in this world. When Christ said to His disciples, "Ye shall drink of my cup" He meant that they should take up the work He had been doing.

When the governor offered his guest a glass of wine it was a great discourtesy not to take it and it is a great breach of courtesy to refuse Christ's offer of salvation.

Philip Sidersky says, "There are always three unleavened loaves of bread on the Passover table. The lower one is dedicated to the people. The middle one to the High Priest and the upper one to God. During the service the middle one is broken in two and one-half of it is laid aside for the Coming One."
Fasting

Bible fasting was designed for the purpose of giving one's carnal activities a recess so that the spiritual man might have time to listen to the teachings of the Spirit. But men have placed their own interpretation on the practice and said that it was for the purpose of laying up merit. The desire is to get God so under obligation to the one who fasts that God must grant any request he may ask. All heathen religions are permeated with this ambition. They desire to get their gods in a corner. Hinduism has outdone all other religions in the severity of its self torture as a method of appealing to deity.

Although God taught the Jews plainly what was the nature and purpose of fasting, yet they proved the rule that no matter how much people may be taught of God yet when they forsake Him and follow their own intuitions they revert to the ways of the carnal man, the heathen. This explains why so many practices of the Jews, and in some branches of the Christian church, are the same as those in the pagan world. They are man made.

When a man regulates his own fasts, he soon becomes a slave to formality and law. The Jews fasted on Monday and Thursday because they said that Moses went up on the mount on Thursday and came down on Monday. Their fasting began at sunrise and continued until the appearance of the first stars.

Some Pharisees were so strict in fasting that they would not salute one another. In Matt. 9:14 they tried to make a break between Christ's disciples and those of His forerunner John over the matter of fasting.

"Most extraordinary instances of the purposes in view in fasting, and of the results obtained, are told in a Jewish legend, which went so far as to relate how a Jewish saint was thereby rendered proof against the fire of Gehenna, of which a realistic demonstration was given when his body was rendered proof against ordinary fire." Edersheim Vol. I, Page 622.

Some rabbis seemed to let their imagination run wild in search of erudite proofs with which to convince their hearers
that their arguments were conclusive. Their tradition says that
"Adam lived apart from Eve for 130 years and wore only a fig
leaf as a penance." "Ruben for seven years drank no wine and ate
no flesh or appetizing food, but mourned over his sins." Simeon
afflicted his soul for two years and fasted as penance for his
hatred of Joseph."

A Syrian Protest

The story is told of an ignorant Syrian priest who could not
count. He was required to fast for forty days. He often blundered
in the reckoning of the days so he asked the bishop to teach him
to count. The bishop counted out forty peas and told him to throw
away one each day. He did this for some days. One day his donkey
threw him into the mud and soiled his robe. A woman offered to
clean it, which work she did while he slept that night. She found
a few peas in his pocket and said, "Poor priest, he has only a few
peas for his lunch. I'll give him more," and she put a great hand-
ful into his pocket. The priest arose and went on his way, throw-
ing out one pea each day. The people complained that he kept them
fasting so long, but he said, "My pocket is half full yet." They
took the matter to the bishop and the story leaked out.

A Blessing in Fasting

Fasting has real value to a devout soul, because it presents
separation unto God in a realistic way. Eating is one of the most
essential and enjoyable experiences in life. To surrender it for a
time is to abandon things temporal for things spiritual and to get
a new view of life's values and of the truth itself. This has been
the retreat where many of God's servants have found the way out
in times of perplexity. God met them in that Holy of Holies and
spoke to them from above the Mercyseat. When they came forth,
they had a new vision and purpose, and were girded with new
strength. Then hindrances vanished and things came to pass, not
in the energy of the flesh but in the power of God, not to fade
with the years but to abide.
Salutations

In Palestine, salutations were of great importance because upon them depended the character of the relationship which followed. A man’s circle of acquaintances was very small because most men stayed at home. Anyone he met while traveling on the highway was apt to be a stranger. The country was usually so full of robbers that it was necessary to know whether a person approaching was friend or foe so this situation developed the use of the salutation, “Is it peace?” 2 Kings 9:17; Josh. 5:13.

Therefore the dangers of Palestine life gave the word “peace” great significance. It was no empty form of speech. It carried the welcome assurance of safety. When Christ said to the disciples, “Peace I leave with you,” He built a wall of safety around them for life. As far as He and His Father were concerned the disciples might expect nothing from them but friendship. And how they worked behind that fortification.

When the Jews became formal in their religion their salutation became formal also and in time grew to be so elaborate that friends spent half an hour making their speech of greeting which meant little more than our “How are you?” That is why Christ said to the seventy, “Salute no man by the way.” Their time was short. They had only one appointment, for while we hear much of the disciples afterward, we never hear of the seventy again.

Rabbis and the Home

The rabbis and the Pharisees had a great influence over the home even to the extent of devouring widow’s houses. Women are the promoters of all religions. Since the Jewish women were not taught the Scriptures they had to depend upon the rabbis and scribes for spiritual knowledge and guidance, which opened the way for the learned men of the nation to play upon their ignorance and make them slaves to their instruction.

It is said that when the Pharisaical rabbis visited Jewish homes to make pastoral calls, they examined everything about the house, dishes, tables, chairs, etc., to see if they were ceremonially clean.
They were present at family devotions to see if father led family prayers correctly and criticised all his defects in teaching and mistakes in the performance of the home services. Thus they laid heavy burdens on the poor people and took much valuable time from their house work and business avocations.

The Bible and the Mishna

The stress which was laid upon rabbinical teaching, such as is found in the Mishna and the Gemara, gave the Scriptures second place. The teachers claimed that the Mishna was given to Moses the same as the Law, for they said, “God taught Moses the law by day and the Mishna by night.” Soon they put the Mishna in the first place, saying, “He that hath learned the Scriptures and not the Mishna is a blockhead.” Then they represented God as studying the Mishna and repeating the decisions of the rabbis.

The Effects of Power

When the Pharisees found themselves holding the reins of power, the temptation to run an independent program was too much and they built a great religious system around themselves. They developed in boldness until some of them asserted that the word of the rabbi was above the Scriptures themselves. Mark 7:13. Paul’s picture in Romans 1, describes the downfall of the teachers. “Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools.” Max Muller says their teaching came from the mad house.

One of their most pleasant diversions was to produce fanciful stories based on Biblical narratives. Rabbi El said: “When Abraham went to fetch the calf for his guests, it escaped into the cave of Machpelah. Abraham ran after it and when he entered the cave he saw Adam and Eve lying there in their beds as though they were sleeping, while lighted candles burned around them, exhaling a fragrant odor.”

Another tradition said that, “When Eve told Satan she should not touch the tree, Satan knew she had overstated the case and
pushed her against it, knowing that nothing would happen. Then, when he had shaken her faith, he got her to eat of it."

Many traditions are told concerning Elijah. "One day Elijah was a little late paying his visit to a certain home. The rabbi asked, 'Why?' Elijah said he had to awaken Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, in succession, wash their hands and wait for each to finish his prayers and return to sleep. 'Why not all pray at once?' the rabbi asked. Elijah said, 'Because if all prayed at once their united prayers would bring the Messiah before His time.'"

Many traditions are associated with Moses also. "When Moses was in the mount he was able to carry the tables of stone because God helped him by carrying one end, but when God saw the people in idolatry, worshiping the golden calf, He withdrew His support and this compelled Moses to throw the tables away." Tradition further says that the second stones Moses prepared were alabaster and that Moses became immensely wealthy by selling the chips which were broken off when he made them.

These illustrations show how tradition becomes a substitute for truth after truth has been rejected. The carnal mind delights to be entertained with fiction which has no conviction; with fanciful stories which are full of sentiment but have no divine revelation of God's truth. Imagine an audience today being fed on such whimsical stories as these.

One startling tradition was that, "Adam and Eve were terrified on leaving Eden. They began to feel the effects of the need of the seventy-two elements and fasted for seven days. Adam then became conscious of the gravity of his sin and fasted forty days standing up to his neck in the river Gihon. At the age of 930 he became very ill and sent Seth with Eve to the Garden of Eden. Seth was attacked by a wild animal. Eve demanded to know how the animal dared attack the image of God and the animal replied that Eve by her sin had lost the right to rule over the animal kingdom. Seth told the animal that it would be brought up at the judgment and the animal let him go."

In spite of the fact that the Bible says in Gen. 7:23, that "Only Noah remained alive," the traditions sprang up like medieval folk-
lore to contradict the truth. One tradition says that, "Og, king of Bashan, sat on a ladder on the ark after all had gone inside and refused to leave. He swore to Noah that he would be his slave forever. Then Noah made a hole in the ark through which he handed food to Og each day." Deut. 3:11.

Superstitions. The Teraphim.

When Rachel stole the Teraphim, Gen. 31:19, she was probably governed by a superstitious belief which was common in her day. The Teraphim was an image, not of any particular deity, but an object in human likeness which people consulted for advice when their own reason and judgment failed to solve their problems. They probably looked the image in the face and then guessed what they had better do, for a carved stick of wood could not talk back even as well as our modern “robot.” It was believed that a person with the gift of insight could consult the image and get any information desired. Jewish writers think that Rachel stole them so that her father, Laban, could not learn by consulting them which route his runaway daughters had taken. The superstition about the Teraphim revealing secrets seemed to catch the Jews during much of their history in spite of the fact that Samuel classed them with witchcraft and rebellion (1 Sam. 15:23 R. V.). Josiah destroyed them in his great reformation (2 Kings 23:24), which seems to have caused the custom to be abolished.

Looking Back

When Lot’s wife looked back at Sodom and became a pillar of salt she seems to have started a superstition which has gone around the world. Gen. 19:26. Even in Japan, if a man left home and forgot something, his wife did not run to the front door and call, “Hoo! Hoo!” to get him back, because it would have brought him bad luck. She took what he forgot and ran after him. If, for any cause, he was compelled to turn back, he gave up the journey. Remarks, like the following, were heard, even in well-regulated homes: “So and so is ill. He got it from looking back.” A woman
with a crooked neck was said to have gotten it when she thoughtlessly turned from her journey and looked back.

A Rule for Drinking

Rabbinical tradition taught that a man should not drink water after nightfall, on Wednesday or Saturday, because of the risk of being poisoned by an evil spirit who prowled abroad on these evenings. If a man be very thirsty let him repeat over the water these words of Psalm 29:3-9, “The voice of the Lord is upon the waters,” etc.

A Debtor's Refuge

The words of Prov. 27:14 probably grew out of a strange custom concerning the debtor. “He that blesseth his friend with a loud voice shall be counted a curse.” There was an unwritten law that when a man left home in the early morning his neighbor must not salute him in a loud voice as he might be a debt-prisoner and be slipping out to get eatables before his creditor comes around to watch for him. As long as a man was in his own home no man dare enter, for if he did in the presence of a woman, he might be killed and his murderer would not be liable according to the laws of the cities.

Insane People Reverenced

One day near the Jaffa Gate, I saw a young man of eighteen who was mentally unbalanced. The bystanders were looking at him in a peculiar way which aroused my curiosity. I found that Mohammedans believe that a fool, or an idiot, has his mind in heaven and that he is not responsible for the things he does on earth. He is a holy man, sometimes a Dervish, and is treated with great respect. To attract attention, some of the Dervishes, who are mentally responsible, cut themselves with knives as did the prophets of Baal, whom they resemble. 1 Kings 18:28.

The Evil Eye

One overmastering superstition among Palestine Mohamme-
dans has to do with the "evil eye." They look upon blue eyes as especially dangerous because they think they can cast an evil blight, even unto death. One man who had one evil eye bandaged it out of compassion for others. The evil eye may be overcome by writing mystic words on an egg and striking the person afflicted on the forehead with the egg. No doubt it would have done him more good if they had fried the egg and let him put it in his mouth.

When workmen build a house they suspend in front of it, an eggshell, a lump of alum, or a donkey's skull, to ward off the evil eye from the building.

Blue is believed to be the color which frightens the devil and overcomes the evil eye. Blue beads are hung on donkeys, camels and horses. Children wear them shaped like an eye, made in Hebron and they are very effective, according to the native mind. Brides wear them at weddings along with a piece of alum. A Mohammedan mother, whose child may be ill burns alum and thinks that she can see in the smoke the faces of those who bewitched her child. Mohammedans use texts from the Koran to break the spell of the "evil eye" while the Jews use Bible verses.

Peter Broke Pharisaic Law

When Peter said to the delegates from Cornelius, "Ye know how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation," he declared one of their strictest laws. The idolatrous practices of the Gentiles formed the great barrier against their association with Jews. But the Pharisees carried the prohibitions to the last degree of absurdity. They never used an article belonging to a Gentile, as it would cause them to be defiled. The Talmud forbade the use of wood from a Gentile forest, and a fire must not be lighted, or food cooked with it. If a weaving shuttle was found to have been made of wood from a heathen idol grove, all the cloth made from it had to be destroyed. If pieces thus made were even accidentally mixed with pieces properly made, all must be destroyed. The Jews made a clean break against everything idolatrous.
The Beard

Few of the Jewish customs were held with more tenacity than those connected with the beard. They declared that God gave man a beard to differentiate him from woman and that when a man shaves his face he dishonors God and disgraces himself. Since the beard was a symbol of manhood, and a part of man's own physical being, he was antagonizing nature when he shaved his face.

On account of the idolatrous practice of cutting the beard round like the sun for Baal worship, God commanded the Jews, "Ye shall not round the corners of your heads." The Jews took the word "corners" to mean the sidelocks in front of each ear and so let these grow until they were long enough to curl. They are called the "Temple lock" and are frequently seen today in Jerusalem. Lev. 19:27; 21:5.

David Pretends To Be Insane

When David was in the hands of the Philistines at Achish he feared for his life and sought some way of escaping. He hit upon the plan of feigning himself insane so they would let him go. Knowing the common belief in the sacredness of the beard he thought if he dishonored his beard he could demonstrate that he was a "bad case" beyond question so he "let his spittle fall on his beard" and it did the work quickly. When the king of Achish saw it he exclaimed to his servants, "Lo, ye see, the man is mad." He knew that no Jew would do such a thing if he was in his right mind. So David escaped to the cave of Adullam.

Polling the Hair

It was the custom that when a man had his hair polled he weighed it and gave its weight in money to some charity. Some nations had a superstition that when the hair is cut it should be burned or hidden because if it is thrown away it will cause a headache. Judas was said to have had red hair on account of his treacherous dealings. The Assyrians wore their hair in several
braids down the neck and Samson did the same. Jud. 16:13-19. When David's soldiers were captured by the Moabites the Moab king ordered that half of their faces should be shaven. This was a terrible insult and the men tarried at Jericho, only sixteen miles from Jerusalem, till their beards were grown, rather than shave the rest of their faces and go home. A heartless trick in warfare was to catch one of the enemy by the beard so he would be helpless, and then slay him. For this reason Alexander had all his soldiers shave to escape this danger. It was by this subtle method that Joab took advantage of Amasa and slew him, partly out of jealousy, and under pretext.

Hair Cutting in Egypt

One of the buffoons of the Pasha of Egypt shaved his beard in a frolic. No sooner did he appear than his women thrust him out of the door. Even his fellows would not eat with him until his beard was grown. The loss of the beard was a greater deformity than the loss of his nose. The beard was associated with truth and honesty. To be deprived of it was a severe punishment and the greatest mark of infamy. A common expression in the estimation of values was, "It was worth more than his beard." A man with a sharp pointed beard was supposed to have superior intelligence.

Gestures

Someone has said that it is difficult to understand a Jew when he is speaking in the dark because he talks so much with his hands. The same humorous fact can be applied to the French. The custom is "catching" for many of our sedate Americans, after living for a time in the Orient, come home with the "habit."

Hands, head and feet are all used to express ideas. If you ask the direction when traveling you will be instructed by the man pointing his chin in the direction of the place rather than pointing with his hand. Lifting up the hand in the Synagogue was a significant gesture. The open hand was to represent an open
heart which meant that nothing was concealed from God. Psalm 28:2. When a judge lifted up his hand it meant the end of the testimony in the case and that he would then render the verdict. When Christ lifted up his hands at the Ascension it meant the end of His earthly life and work for the time. In the priest’s benediction the second and third fingers were held apart. A priests’ hand cut on a tombstone meant that he was a descendent of Aaron. A hand with a bundle of herbs represented a physician’s tomb.

The Hand on the Mouth

Job 21:37 presents an interesting custom in connection with their educational courtesies. When a student sat in front of his teacher, he put his hand upon his mouth to indicate that he had nothing to say but that he was all ears, listening. In all Job’s conversation with his “friends” he is never seen acting out this custom once but as soon as God began to speak Job says, “Behold I am vile; what shall I answer thee? I will lay mine hand upon my mouth.” Job realized that he could not compete with the Almighty in knowledge.

A Market Custom

“Striking hands” was a common practice in the market place but it was accompanied with many dangers. Solomon warned against it just as a wise father today would warn his son against signing a note as surety for a friend. Said he, “Be not thou one of them that strike hands, or of them that are sureties for debts.” Prov. 22:26. After a bargain had been arranged the two parties struck hands together to bind the bargain which was about the same as our custom of “shaking hands” in a transaction.

Gestures for the Servants

It was in the hotel at Seoul, Korea, that I had my first experience in gesturing for the servant. I had just seated myself at the dining table when I heard a loud noise at my right. Half fright-
ened I turned suddenly to see what could have caused it when I heard another at my left. I awoke to the fact that it was the custom to call the waiter by a loud clap of the hands and I immediately joined the others in the crude unmannerly practice, rather than starve. This custom of calling the servants with the hand must have been common in Palestine judging from Psalm 123:2. “Behold the eyes of the servants look unto the hand of their master and the eyes of the maiden unto the hand of her mistress, so our eyes wait upon the Lord our God.”

The Purpose of the Study

If the study of these Bible Customs is to be a blessing, other than the interest which comes from knowing what the other half of the world does, then the reader must get the blessing from God. Writers may do their best but “it is the Spirit that quickeneth.”

Everywhere, those that know God and receive answers to prayer, live side by side with those who think little of God and who seldom pray. The Bible woman who gave the “two mites” may have been a victim of the scribes who “robbed widow’s houses.” Luke 20:47; 21:4. Simeon who took the babe Jesus in his arms may have been well known to Caiaphas who pronounced the verdict of Christ’s crucifixion. The colored Ethiopian eunuch found his Saviour in the same book that Jehoiachim cut with the penknife and threw into the fire.

The Bible is a book of life to millions but it will never be any more than a printed volume unless you want it to be. It is a book to be searched and not to be glanced over like a newspaper; to be obeyed and not to be read like fiction. It presents God’s salvation in Christ and unless its’ readers get that personal salvation from it for themselves they miss God’s purpose for their lives.