

INTRODUCTORY ACTIVITIES

FAMILY LIFE IN JESUS' TIME

Answers to Family Life in Jesus' Time research questions. More in-depth answers may be found in the Reader's Digest, *Jesus and His Times*, and *Handbook of Life in Bible Times* by J. A. Thompson.

1. Houses were usually packed closely together because space was limited in many areas. Most people lived in one-story houses with flat roofs. Only the wealthy lived in houses with several rooms. The rooftop was called the "upper room," and it was used for cooking, sleeping, and entertaining. Sometimes religious ceremonies were conducted there. Houses were made of dried brick or rough stone. Floors were made of clay. In wealthier houses, floors were sometimes paved. Roofs were made of branches which were woven together and then covered with clay. There were no bathrooms. Washing was done in the street or courtyard. Animals were cared for in the houses, but kept below the living area.

Jesus had to leave the towns or villages and retire to the wilderness or garden to find quiet.

2. Houses were lit by clay lamps which burned coarse olive oil or fat. The light usually lasted two to four hours.

3. Water was scarce in Palestine. Wells were dug below the surface to reach the water supply. Other sources of water were the springs in and around the towns. Also, cisterns were built to catch rain water.

4. Sheep and goats were kept for milk, cheese, meat, and wool. Chickens were raised for meat and eggs. Bread was baked in a large oven kept outside in the courtyard. Other available foods were melons, figs, vegetables, nuts, wild fowl, and fish. Pork was forbidden. Wild honey or date syrups sweetened their foods. Families ate with their fingers by dipping bread in bowls.

5. Both men and women wore tunics. Men's tunics were tied with leather belts or cloth girdles. Men wore sandals and sometimes wore a white cloth over their heads. Most women wore head coverings and sandals, too. In public, women covered their faces with a veil.

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FAMILY LIFE IN JESUS' TIME (Cont.)

6. Transportation in Palestine was either by foot, donkey, camel, or boat. Wealthy people used carriages, a two-wheeled cart or four-wheeled wagon. Litters were also used by the wealthy. Six or eight bearers balanced them on their shoulders. Caravans were available to join, if one was traveling a long distance.

7. Aramaic, Hebrew, Greek, and Latin were spoken.

8. Only boys went to school. They learned to read and write. In the synagogue, boys were taught the Old Testament by a rabbi. Education consisted entirely of the Torah (written law) and the traditions handed down by spiritual teachers through the centuries. Girls were taught by their mothers whatever they needed to know to fulfill their obligations as wives and mothers according to Jewish tradition. Girls were not taught the Scriptures.

9. Rome. At the time of Jesus' birth, Herod the Great was in power. Pontius Pilate, as a Roman procurator or governor, ruled during the adult life of Jesus. The Jews had a supreme court called the Sanhedrin which made decisions regarding Jewish life.