

Everyday Life in Bible Times  
Chapter 4 – Food and Drink

**Lesson 4.01**  
**Water**

Of all foods and drink, water is the most important.  
We need water for ourselves, to drink.  
But we also need water for growing all other foods.  
If there were no water, plants die, animals die, we have no food, and people die.

When there is no rain for a long time, that is called a **famine**.  
Hunger is terrible.  
Water is most important.

Long ago in people Israel got water from:

**1. Rivers**

Rivers provided water for farms and for people to drink.

**2. Wells**

People got clean water from wells.  
They pulled up water for animals and for drinking.  
The Bible has a lot of stories about wells.

**3. Springs**

Water flowing out of the ground is called a spring.

**4. Cisterns**

When it rained, farms and cities could save a lot of water in a deep wide hole or pit in the ground. That pit was called a cistern.  
Rain water drained into the pit.  
When people needed water, they dipped it out from the cistern just like a well.

Water from a well was clean.  
But water from a cistern was dirty.

People could keep a jug of water cool by putting it in a window.  
The breeze through the window cooled the water.

**STUDY QUESTION**

Read Jeremiah 2:11-13

God compares a broken cistern to what?

**Lesson 4.02**  
**“Breaking Bread”**

You know the Lord’s Prayer:

*Our Father, who art in heaven,  
hallowed by Thy Name;  
Thy kingdom come;  
Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread...*

“Daily bread” means what?

The Bible often uses the word “bread” as a picture word that means various kinds of food:

Meat  
Fruit  
Vegetables  
Drink

All of that is included in that one word, “bread.”

In the Lord’s prayer, “Give us this day our daily bread” means everything that we need for our body’s life.

Another phrase you may have seen in the Bible “breaking bread.”

“Breaking bread” means friends get together to eat together and share fellowship.

Remember Jesus’ disciple Judas.

He ate with Jesus.

Judas shared fellowship with Jesus, as a true friend.

Then later that night Judas left and betrayed Jesus.

Bread was very important for daily life in Israel.

Now we will study how they made bread.

**STUDY QUESTION**

Read John 6:32 - 35

“The Bread of Life” is what?

**Lesson 4.03**  
**Flour**

In chapter 2 we studied about farms growing wheat, barley, and various grains. We learned how the farmers harvested the grain, cleaned, and stored the grain.

When a family wanted to make bread, they ground the grain for making flour.

What kind of grain did they use for making bread?

- Wheat
- Barley
- Spelt
- Millet

In the King James Version (KJV) of the Bible, we find the word “**corn.**” “Corn” is an old English word that means any grain – wheat, barley, etc. It does not mean American corn-on-the-cob.

One simple way they had for grinding grain to become coarse flour was to put a small amount of grain into a small pot and then crush the grain with a stone.

Most people used a **mill stone** for making flour that looked like this:

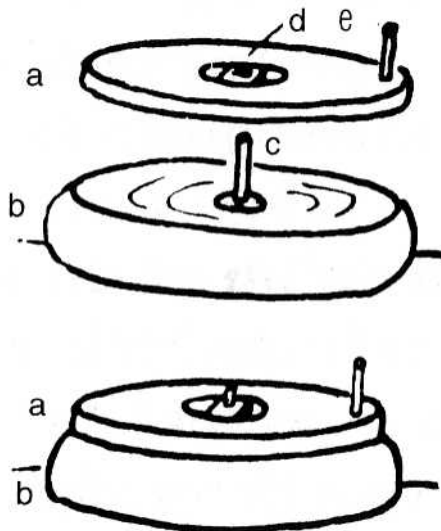
The mill had two stones.

The base (b) was a thick flat stone that lay on the ground or on the floor.

On top was the mill stone (a) that was flat and round, about 2 feet wide, 4 inches thick, with a hole in the middle.

They poured grain in the hole while they turned the handle.

Flour came out the sides.



- a. upper stone
- b. base stone
- c. axle
- d. wooden bearing
- e. handle

*Watch video lesson 4.03 to see examples of ancient flour mills.*

**STUDY QUESTION**

Read Deuteronomy 24:6

What special law did God command about mill stones?

**Lesson 4.04**  
**Mixing Bread Dough.**

In the Lord's Prayer we pray, "...*Give us this day our daily bread...*"

*Daily* bread?

Yes, long ago people in Israel made their bread almost every day.

During the week, they baked bread six days.

On the seventh day they rested.

Baking on the Sabbath day was forbidden.

In our last lesson we saw how they made flour using a stone mill.

They poured in wheat, they ground it, and the flour came out.

That flour was a little rough, so they poured the flour through a screen mesh, a sieve.

The flour fell through the sieve, clean and smooth.

They threw out the rough stuff that was left in the sieve.

Then they pour the flour into a bowl.

They mixed the flour with

salt,  
olive oil,  
water or milk,  
and yeast.

When they added the yeast, the dough began to rise.

The Bible calls yeast "**leaven.**"

During one special Jewish holiday called **Passover**, they baked bread without yeast.

During Passover, leaven was forbidden.

Why?

During the first Passover in Egypt, the Jews were in a hurry to escape.

They did not have enough time to wait for bread to rise.

So they made bread that was flat, like bread that we eat in the Lord's Supper,  
or like a Mexican tortilla, Greek pita, or Jewish matzo.

Bread made without yeast is called "**unleavened bread.**"

**STUDY QUESTION**

Read 1 Corinthians 5:1-13

Leaven is compared to what?

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**Lesson 4.05**  
**Baking Ovens**

The flour, oil, and water were mixed with yeast. Then they then kneaded the dough. Now it was ready for baking in an oven.

Long ago in Israel, people had ovens that they made with clay. The ovens were shaped like a dome, with a hole in the top for smoke to escape. The ovens had an opening in front for making the fire. When oven was hot, they put in the bread dough and closed the opening in the top.

Some small homes had a pit in the floor. They put several stones in the pit. They built a fire in the pit that made the stones very hot. Then they put bread dough in the pit for baking.

Roman communities had one large oven. and all families in the village shared, using that oven.

So each family baked enough in one time, that they ate several days.

People who lived in large cities did not need to bake. They could go to the market, and buy their bread. that bakers sold.

**STUDY QUESTION**

Read John 6:5-13

Jesus fed 5,000 people with what kind of bread?

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**Lesson 4.06**  
**Simple Camp Stove**

Another way people cooked was to use a flat metal sheet that they cut into a circle. They hammered it to make a shallow bowl, and then they flipped it over so it became a metal dome.

They lay stones on the ground in the shape of a circle. They built a fire inside that circle of stones. Then they put the metal dome over the fire. They edge of the dome rested on the stones, so air could get under the dome and feed the fire. When the metal dome became hot, they lay bread on it for baking.

When people travel, they could carry that metal dome with them on their donkey. It was very light. People in the Middle East still bake with this kind of stove today.  
*Watch video lesson 4.06 to see an example of this kind of stove.*

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People baked bread in a variety of ways.  
They made sweet deserts. folding in dried fruit, like figs or raisins.  
They poured in honey from bees and grape syrup.  
It was very delicious.

The Bible says that when people found wild hone, they ate it directly from the bee hive.  
They also saved honey in jars and used it later as a sweetener in cooking.

Long ago people made sweet bread, as we do today.  
They put a small piece of bread dough in hot olive oil, and let it boil for a few minutes.  
It was sweet and delicious.

**STUDY QUESTION**

Read Psalm 119:103

Sweet food is compared to what?

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**Lesson 4.07**

**Vegetables**

In spring time around our months of April and May, farm lands in Israel. have enough water from rain and morning dew to grow crops. It was not necessary to give the land more water.

About the time of May, the rain stopped.  
The summer was really dry.  
The land need water irrigation to continue growing food.

Jewish farms grew various kinds of vegetables, chiefly legumes, like beans and lentils  
Those were healthy foods that had a lot of good protein.

When the beans were ready to harvest, the farmers did not pick them one at a time.  
They pulled up the whole plants and they the plants out in the sun to dry.  
Then they beat the plants, breaking the bean pods (shells) open.  
The seeds fell out.  
Then, just like they did with wheat, they threw everything into the air.  
The wind blew the chaff away and the seeds fell straight back to the ground.  
Then they gathered up the bean seeds and poured them through a sieve.

Now the beans were clean and they stored the beans in a clay jar.  
The beans would stay good for a long time.

Jewish farmers grew many other kinds of fruits, vegetables, and herbs –

melons	leeks	cabbage	coriander seed	mint
cucumbers	parsley	dill	cassia	anise
onions	celery	mustard	cinnamon	saffron
garlic	lettuce			

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Notice that that potatoes are not in that list.

When the people of Israel escaped from Egypt, they wandered in the desert for 40 years. The people looked back, and they complained that they missed various vegetables in Egypt. But when they arrived in Israel, they could enjoy those foods again.

**STUDY QUESTION**

Read Genesis 25:30-34

Esau wanted a bowl of red lentil stew. He paid what for the stew?

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**Lesson 4.08**

**Meat and Vegetable Stew**

People ate some vegetables raw.

They also cooked vegetables in stews,  
cooking meat with vegetables and bread dough for a long time.

When the meal was ready, the family ate on a low table,  
or they had a mat on the floor.

When people ate, they sat cross-legged or they lay on their sides.

They did not have forks or spoons.  
They used their hands for eating.

Jewish law required that people must first wash their hands before they could eat.  
And because they sat or lay near other people's feet, they also washed their feet.  
When a visitor came in someone's home, a servant poured water over their hands over a bowl.  
And then the servant washed the visitor's feet.

When they ate stews, they use flat bread, like pita bread.  
They folded the bread, and used that to scoop up stew and eat it.

Good friends showed their friendship, how?  
They both picked up bread, folded it, and they dipped it in the stew together, and they ate it at the same time.

When eating was finished, they washed their hands again.

**STUDY QUESTION**

Read John 13:26

Jesus and a friend dipped bread into the stew together. Who was that friend?

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**Lesson 4.09**

**Meat**

Jewish farms had various animals – sheep, cows, and goats.  
They used cows for work for milk.  
They had sheep and goats for wool and milk.

If they killed their cows for meat, their work animal was gone. Their milk was gone.  
If they killed their sheep, and goats, for meat, their wool and milk were gone.  
People did not eat meat often.  
Sometimes they killed an animal for meat for special celebrations, feasts, or offerings to God.

They could not keep raw meat a long time.  
They did not have cold refrigeration, no freezing, no canning.

Sometimes they sliced the meat thin.  
They pressed salt into the meat and covered the meat in salt.  
The salt sucked out the moisture and made the meat dry.  
In some places they could hang the meat slices in the hot sun to dry.  
They could keep dry meat for several months.

They cooked most meats in stews with vegetables. stirring.  
They cooked the stews a long time, often stirring the pot.  
If they kept the stew hot, it stayed good.

For special meals – religious celebrations, family gatherings, Passover celebrations – .  
they cooked the meat directly over a fire, turning it on a pole.

**Preparing the meat**

They chose a young cow, a young sheep, or a lamb.  
They killed the animal, following religious rules for letting the blood drain into the soil.  
They removed the inner organs and the skin.

They tied the animal body on a wood pole that was green and wet,  
and they turned the pole over a fire, cooking slowly for several hours.

When the meat was ready, they cut the best meat and gave it to the guest of honor.

**STUDY QUESTION**

Read Luke 15:20-24

The Lost Son came home. How did the father celebrate?



**Lesson 4.10**  
**Fish & Fowl**

How did people cook fish?

They cleaned it,  
cut it lengthwise,  
removed inner organs,  
sprinkled herbs,  
and cook it over an open fire.

When the cooked fish was ready, they ate in their hands.

Another way for preparing fish –

they put salt on the fish,  
they set the fish out in the sun to dry,  
salted the fish again,  
and dried it more.

Dried fish could stay good for a long time.

Also, they could grind dried fish to become “fish flour.”

Shepherds poured some of fish flour into a leather bag that they could carry while they walked and eat for lunch.

While Jewish people lived in Egypt, they regularly ate fish.

After their exodus, while they wandered in the desert 40 years, they often complained, “I wish we had fish!”

In Israel, they caught a lot of fish for food any place near water –

west along the Mediterranean Sea,  
north around the Sea of Galilee,  
east along the Jordan River.

They had plenty of fish.

**Birds**

The Bible does not say much about bird meat.

Jewish people could eat most birds, both farm birds and wild birds.

A few birds that ate dead animals, they were “unclean.”

Jews could not eat the meat of those birds.

But most other clean birds were alright.

Remember that Jesus said, “You can buy two sparrows for one penny...” (*Matthew 10:29*)

Two small birds for one penny – that is not worth much!

Does that mean that people ate the meat of those birds for food? Yes.

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Today, when we think of bird meat, the first kind we think of is **chicken**.

The Old Testament never says anything about chickens.  
In the New Testament we see roosters, hens, chicks, and eggs.

The only bird meat we see in the Bible were **quail** that Jewish people ate one time during their 40-year wandering. We don't see any other bird meat in the Bible.

Also, we see **doves** and **pigeons** as animals for sacrifices that poor people, who didn't have a cow or a sheep, to offer to God.

Doves and pigeons were “clean” birds.  
So we can guess that some Jewish farms had doves and pigeons for meat.

Both the Old Testament and New Testament talk about eating **eggs**.

#### STUDY QUESTION

Read Matthew 10:29-30

Jesus talked about the cost of two small birds. Why? (Read context.)

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### Lesson 4.11 Milk & Cheese

When the People of Israel left Egypt, God promised to give them “a land flowing with milk and honey.”

Milk is a picture for great life that grew in that land.  
That picture means that people will have enough food and be satisfied.

Their milk came from sheep and goats.  
Poor families had goats for milk.

People living east of the Jordan river had cows, so of course, they drank cows' milk.

People who live on farms had plenty of milk.  
People who live in the cities did not have much milk.

People used milk for...

#### 1. drinking

Mostly children drank fresh milk.

People keep milk cool by putting the milk in a jar and then putting that jar down into a well of cool water, or in a cool cave,

#### 2. cottage cheese

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If you keep milk a long time, it will become “sour.”  
Eventually milk will make lumps like cottage cheese.  
Those lumps are called “curds.”

Long ago people dried those curds.  
They mixed that with dried fruit and nuts,  
and they carried that mix in a shepherd’s bag for a snack.

### 3. cheese

They made various kinds of cheese, in various ways.  
They start with cottage cheese.  
They press the curds together.  
and let it become hard and become cheese.

#### STUDY QUESTION

Read 1 Samuel 17:17-18

What food did David bring to his brothers and their army officers?

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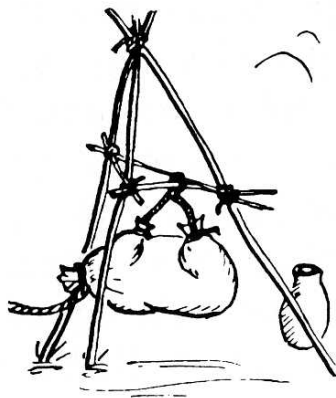
#### Lesson 4.12

##### Butter

People in Israel made butter. how?

They left milk to settle.  
Cream rose to the top; they skimmed off the cream.  
They poured the cream into a jar.  
They sealed the jar and shook it fast.  
Slowly lumps of butter formed in water that was called “butter milk.”

Another way for making butter was with a **goatskin butter church**.



First clean a full goat skin.  
Then sow it back into the shape of the goat’s body.

Pour in milk cream.  
Blow in air to inflate the goatskin.  
Hang up the goatskin and shake it fast.  
The cream becomes butter.

Pour out the water. That’s called “butter milk.”  
They saved the butter milk for drinking later.  
Then they scraped out the butter.

They put the butter in a pan. over fire; any remaining water evaporates.  
Then they poured the butter in jars for storage.

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Farmers in the Middle East still use this way for making butter.

They used butter in their cooking – frying and baking, mixed with other foods.  
People did not spread butter on bread, as we do today.

**STUDY QUESTION**

Read Proverbs 30:33

Making butter is like what?

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Read chapter 5 in *Everyday Life in Bible Times*.