

Everyday Life in Bible Times  
Chapter 8 – Social Customs & Family Life

**Lesson 8.01**  
**Introduction**

Culture, family traditions, and religious traditions in the Middle East have not changed since Bible times... until recently, when American technology and culture has influence life there.

**Hygiene & Body Care**

Jewish law required bathing and hand washing for good health and hygiene (staying clean) and also for religious traditions.

Dirt is like a picture for sin, so washing is a picture for removing sin.

Remember the story about Jesus and His crucifixion.

During his trial, the governor Pontius Pilate washed his hands. why?

That was Pilate's way for showing he did not want to accept guilt for ordering Jesus' crucifixion.

Rich people had rooms in their homes for bathing.

During New Testament times, some communities had public buildings where people went for bathing. Romans had many public baths. Also, there were a few public baths in Israel.

When bathing was finished, people like anointing themselves with oil or perfume.

In Israel, people had olive oil. But many people like to have perfumes from other countries.

**Nard** was a perfume has a strong smell, and it was very expensive.

**Hair Styles**

When you imagine how Jesus looked, your mental picture is from where?

The Bible?

Or European artists painting from their imagination that Jesus had long hair?

Is that true?

No. The Bible says that most men had short hair.

Jewish culture did not approve men having long hair.

The Bible names a few men that had long hair, like Samson (Judges 16-13) and David's son, Absalom (2 Samuel 18:9). The Bible also says that their long hair was special, not normal.

Egyptian men shaved their heads.

Jewish traditions did not accept that.

Women had long hair that they braided.

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When women went outside the home, they put their hair up. and covered their heads.

Women having short hair was not proper.

It was also not proper for a woman to go out in public without covering her head.

**STUDY QUESTION**

Read John 12:1-8

What special gift did Mary give to Jesus?

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**Lesson 8.02**

**Clothing**

In Bible times, men's clothing was simple.

They had a robe called a **tunic**.

It has elbow-length sleeve, or it was sleeveless.

The robe was knee-length; in cold weather. it was longer.

The belt was called a **girdle**.

Men also had a **coat** that was like a robe, tied with a belt.

In warm weather the took the coat off and used it like a sack for carrying clothes and other things. Or they just folded the coat up and carried it under their arm.

Many coats had blue fringes that remind the wearer to obey God's laws.

People had nice coats for special events. Rich people had fancy coats that had colors and designs for showing off and giving as gifts to impress friends.

In really cold weather, people had a third garment, called a **cloak**.

It was thick.

It covered the head and it went down to below the waist.

It has vertical stripes.

Jewish law protected poor people. If their debts forced them to sell things, they could keep their cloak.

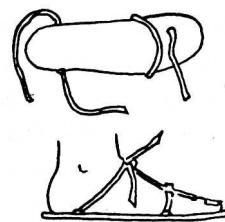
People in the Middle East still wear cloaks.

On their feet, both men and women wore **sandals**.

The sole was leather or wood.

Leather straps from the sides tied on top.

Some sandals cover the foot like a shoe.



If you saw a person walking barefoot, without sandals, that person could have been poor, or that person was sad, showing his grief.

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How did men cover their heads?

One simple covering was a square lined cloth, folded into a triangle. Lay the cloth on the head, point to the rear (back), side corners pulled back and tie with a cloth band.

Today we also see men wearing turbans wound around the head.  
Did men have that long ago in Bible times? We don't know.

Now we shift to women's clothing.

Men's clothing and women's clothing looked similar.  
Men's cloth was a little rough.  
Women's cloth was more nice.

Men's robes were knee length.  
Women's robes were full length.

Men wore thin belts.  
Women wore wide sashes.

When women went outside, they wore a veil covering their face.

When you read the Old Testament prophets, sometimes you notice that the prophets criticized rich women who liked to dress in really fancy, expensive clothes.

**STUDY QUESTION**

Read Matthew 6:25-34

What did Jesus teach us about clothing?

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**Lesson 8.03**  
**Ornaments & Jewelry**

Sometimes, men had a **ring** on their right hand.

That ring had their special design that they pressed in wax, like signing a letter or notarizing official certificates. That was their seal, also called a **signet ring**. Their ring was their identification (I.D.).

Sometimes men had a wood **staff** they could use for defense.  
But they made the staff fancy with carvings and a gold cap, to make people respect them more.

In other countries around Israel, men had earrings and gold necklaces, but Jewish men did not copy them.

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Jewish women wore **gold earrings**, that had small expensive gemstones.

Women wore **gold nose rings**.

Women wore **necklaces** made of gold or pearls.

Women had **gold bracelets** on their wrists and on the ankles.  
Some angle bracelets had small bells.

Old Testament prophets criticized rich women who dressed in gold earrings, necklaces, etc.

Some rich women wore **make up**, that looked like an Egyptian painting. It looked fake.

People in Bible times had **mirrors** they were metal, made of polished brass.

**STUDY QUESTION**

Read Genesis 24

Abraham's servant gave Rebecca what?  
Why?

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**Lesson 8.04**

**Betrothal & Marriage**

Long ago in Bible times, men and women married at about what age? The Bible does not say. But ancient Jewish tradition was for boys to marry around the age of 16 or 17, and girls married about the age of 15 or 16.

Rabbis said that boys could marry at age 13 and girls could marry at age 12. But most people did not marry that young. If a person was 20-years old and still not married, that was strange.

When a boy and girl are ready to get married, first they made a promise to each other. That is called **betroth**. “Betrothal” is similar to our tradition now, that we call “engagement.”

Normally parents chose a wife for their son, and they chose a husband for their daughter.

Of course, parents discussed with their sons and daughters about whom they wanted to marry.

Boys and girls did not date. They were never alone together. That was forbidden. They could meet each other while mingling with other people.

Both sets of parents prepared the betrothal for their children.

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A fifth person would be involved as a negotiator.

When they decided on a wedding date, fathers signed a contract.  
That was a legal promise.

The boy's family gave a large gift to the girl's family.

Their engagement was between 9 - 12 months.

They still could not be alone together.

During that time, the boy worked building or preparing the house for his future family.

If something wrong happened -- if the girl had an affair with another man -- her fiancé could break the engagement. That was the same as divorce.

He could sue in court.

Or he could just quietly break off the betrothal, and let her go back to her parents.

During that time for betrothal, the families could ask for changes in their contract.  
They continued negotiating.

When the couple married, they stayed married for life.

The Bible permitted divorce only if the other person committed adultery, or they discovered that the partner had sexual sin before they became engaged.

**STUDY QUESTION**

Read Matthew 1:18-19

Mary became pregnant. Why was that a problem?

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**Lesson 8.05**

**Weddings**

Remember that before marriage, a couple were betrothed for nine months, up to one year.

When the wedding day arrived, the woman stayed home.

The man with his friends waked as a group toward the bride's home.

Gossip spread quickly. Her friends heard the news and they came join the procession.

The group arrived at the girl's home.

The girl came to the door and met them.

She joined the group, and they all went back to the groom's house.

Both fathers were already there waiting.

The two fathers and the groom signed the marriage contract.

And then the official wedding happened.

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The bride and groom shared one cup of wine together.  
That was a picture of their life of joy together.

Nowadays they have weddings outdoors.

When the wedding was finished, next was the feast.  
Friends and family sat around a large table.  
The groom decided the seating order – who was first, second, third. etc.

The wedding feast has plenty of food. If they ran out, that was very embarrassing.

The Bible has a story about a wedding feast, and the wine ran out.  
Jesus gave them more wine. (John 2:1-11)

The Bible often compares the relationship between a husband and wife with the relationship between God and his people. The Bible says that our relationship with God is like marriage.

Jesus told many stories about weddings and wedding feasts as a picture of His relationship with us.

The Bible says that His church is the “Bride of Christ” and Christ is the “Husband” of His church. But we, the Church, is not yet fully married to Christ. We are still betrothed (engaged) still in the time of promise, while we wait for Christ to bring us to His home. When Christ comes again, that is like our wedding day in heaven. (See Hosea 2:16-23; Ephesians 5:21-33; Revelation 19:6-8; Revelation 20:1-4, 9-10)

**STUDY QUESTION**

Read Matthew 25:1-13  
We must keep watching for what?

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**Lesson 8.06**

**Children**

When men and women marry, one blessing that God gives is children.  
Yes, Jewish families see children as blessings from God.  
And many children are a huge blessing.

Couples often wanted their first baby to be a boy for passing on the family name.  
Also, when the parents became old, the first son would care for them.

If a woman could not become pregnant, she felt grief, and other women mocked her.  
But God defended childless women, and He promised a special blessing for them.

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You know a few women in the Bible who could not bear children:

Sarah, Abraham's wife -- Eventually they had a son named Isaac.

Rachel, Jacob's 2nd wife --

She cried out to God. Eventually she had two sons named Joseph and Benjamin.

Hannah cried out to God -- Eventually she had a son named Samuel.

Elizabeth -- Eventually she had a son named John the Baptizer.

**STUDY QUESTION**

Read 1 Samuel 1:1-20

What did Hannah pray?

How did God answer her prayer?

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**Lesson 8.07**

**Caring for Babies**

Long ago in Bible times, they had no hospitals.

All babies were born at home.

Women hired nurses called **midwives** who helped them through the birth.

When the baby was born, midwife

caught the baby,

cut the cord,

washed the baby in warm water,

rubbed on salt,

rubbed on olive oil,

and wrapped the baby tight in cloth.

They thought that a tight wrap helped the baby to grow strong.

Of course, mothers wanted to care for their own babies. But if a new mother could not breast feed, she hired another mother who was already breast feeding a baby to also feed her baby. That 2<sup>nd</sup> woman was called a **wet nurse**.

If the newborn baby was a boy, one week later, on the 8<sup>th</sup> day, the father or the rabbi circumcised him.

For the Jewish religion, circumcision is a sign for God's promise in relationship with His people, Israel. Circumcision was also a sign of God's relationship with the baby. That is like Christian baptism, which shows our relationship with God.

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Also, on the 8<sup>th</sup> day, the parents gave the baby its name.

Jewish names have a meaning.

Parents gave a name that expressed how the parents felt about the baby's birth.

Or the baby's name describes how the baby looks... like Esau (Gen. 25:25).

Or the baby's name describes something that happened during the baby's birth, like Jacob (Gen. 25:26).

Or the baby's name describes his parents' vision of what the baby will grow up and become and do.

Sometimes God gave the name that described His plan for that person's life, like the name **Jesus**, that means "the Lord Saves."

Or sometimes parents picked a name that honored an ancestor, and they gave that name to their baby.

Forty days after the birth of a boy, his mother went to the temple to offer sacrifice for her religious cleansing. Eighty days after the birth of a girl, her mother went to the temple to offer the sacrifice.

If a woman's **first baby** was a boy, his the parents must offer an additional animal sacrifice for that boy. This sacrifice was not necessary for the rest of the children, only the first born boy.

God established that law for teaching the people of Israel their history.

Remember when Israel escaped from Egypt.

The Egyptian king let them go free. Why?

Because in one night all the Egyptian first born died.

And God wanted Israel to never forget the price the Egyptians paid for their freedom.

So in every generation, Jewish first born boys belong to God.

God does not permit human sacrifice, so parents must substitute an animal for the baby.

Mothers breast fed their children for 2 - 3 years.

When breast feeding stopped, the family had a celebration.

#### STUDY QUESTIONS

Read Exodus 1:15 – 2:10

1. Midwives protected Hebrew children, how?
2. God blessed the midwives, how?
3. The king's daughter chose whom to breastfeed her adopted baby?

## Lesson 8.08 Training Children

While children grow up, who was responsible for teaching them?

God's plan is that parents teach their children,  
helping them develop right character,  
helping them become close to God,  
and, of course, helping them learn skills for life.

But today... Many parents drop their responsibility. They think, "*Let the government teach my children. The government manages the schools. That's their job. And when my children are home, if they sit quiet watching TV, then I am happy because the kids are not bothering me.*"

Sadly, many parents have that attitude.  
If parents don't teach their own children, how can they learn?

In the Bible, God put it down in the law for Israel:  
Parents must teach their children.  
They must teach them to have a relationship with God.

**"Israel, listen to me. The Lord is our God. The Lord is the one and only God.  
Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul.  
Love him with all your strength."**

***The commandments I give you today must be in your hearts.***

***Make sure your children learn them.***  
***Talk about them when you are at home.***  
***Talk about them when you walk along the road.***  
***Speak about them when you go to bed.***  
***And speak about them when you get up.***

***Write them down and tie them on your hands as a reminder.***  
***Also tie them on your foreheads.***  
***Write them on the doorframes of your houses.***  
***Also write them on your gates."* (Deuteronomy 6:4-9 NIRV)**

Every Jewish family celebrates Passover. Why?  
For teaching children their history about God saving His people.

During the Passover meal, four times the children ask, "Why are we are doing this?" And four times the father answers, telling them the story about Israel's slavery in Egypt and how God saved them.

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The various family activities during the Passover celebration connect back to that time when Israel was Egypt.

Doing that every year helps children learn.  
Other Jewish celebration days also teach history.

Our Christian celebration days do the same.  
Every year our religious celebrations teach our children about Jesus'  
birth,  
crucifixion,  
suffering,  
death,  
resurrection,  
and ascension.

In Jewish homes, another important day for teaching God's Word is the **Sabbath**.

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**Lesson 8.09**  
**Training Older Children**

While children grew up, they learned about work and life skills by working with their parents.

Boys and their fathers worked together.  
Girls and their mothers worked together.

Boys learned their fathers' business.  
They became helpers for the fathers' work.

Girls learned many skills for home life.  
    milling grain  
    baking  
    food preparation  
    making cloth:  
        spinning  
        weaving  
        sewing  
        knitting  
    caring for children

Who taught Jewish children to read and write?  
Parents – both father and mother.  
But the person most responsible was the father.  
They emphasized teaching their sons, so they could read God's Word themselves.

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In big cities, Jewish rabbis established synagogue schools for teaching the holy scrolls.  
Together they had much practice for memorizing God's Word.

For Jewish children, their most important teachers were their parents.  
They taught their children not only information, and work skills.  
They emphasize teaching wisdom and honoring the Lord.

But Greek and Roman parents...  
Hands off their children's training and education.  
They paid professional teachers.

**STUDY QUESTION**  
Read Ephesians 6:1-4  
Fathers are responsible for doing what?

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**Lesson 8.10**  
**Hospitality**

Long ago in Jewish culture, if someone came to your home for a visit, it was really to welcome your guest and show kindness. Still today in the Middle East that is the custom.

If a visitor shows up, offer him food and drink.  
If he is travelling far, offer him to sleep overnight.

In ancient times, people showed respect by bowing.  
People greeted one another by asking God's blessings.  
“God be kind to you.”  
“The Lord be with you.”  
“Shalom” (Peace be with you.)

When family or friends meet, they hug and kiss on the cheek.  
When people leave, and again they hug and kiss on the cheek, and ask God's blessing.

Jesus warned about exaggerated, false flattery.  
He wants us to stay honest, kind, and nice.  
That's all.

**STUDY QUESTION**  
Read Genesis 18:1-8  
Abraham welcomed his visitors how?

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**Lesson 8.11**  
**Games, Toys, and Recreation**

Life in Israel was not “all work, no play.”  
No. People regularly suspended work and enjoyed play.

Archeologists have found various toys and games that children played long ago.

They had a board game, made of wood, that had moving pieces.  
But how did they play the game? We don’t know.

Children had balls. But again, we don’t know the rules for their ball games.

Children long ago are no different than children today. They are the same.  
Children like to play, copying their parents activity –

- dressing up
- playing house
- play cooking
- playing weddings
- playing work

Children had toys that were small copies of work animals and adult equipment.

Children had play songs that they learned from other children, just like children do today.

How did Adults play? What did grown-ups do for enjoyment?  
People who lived in cities liked to gather near the city gate.

Remember that most cities had walls around them for protection.  
Travelers entered and exited through the gates.

- visitors
- farmers selling food
- business people selling their things

Markets for selling were near the city gates.  
While people came to shop,  
    men met together to chat, and tell stories.  
    women shared family news.  
    and community leaders discussed politics.

Special events in families, like weddings and religious celebrations, were occasions for people to gather for a party, singing, and dancing.

When the community had special events, people gathered for celebrations.  
If the army had victory in war, they marched home through the streets while crowds cheered.

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When a new king was crowned, the community suspended work and celebrated.  
And several religious holy days inspired joyful celebration.

If a famous person arrived for a visit, people gathered along the way to get a look and cheer,  
like when Jesus rode the donkey into Jerusalem. (Matthew 21:1-11)

**STUDY QUESTION**

Read 1 Samuel 18:5-7

The people celebrated. Why? How?

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**Lesson 8.12**

**Banquets**

The Bible has many stories about gatherings to banquets.

When we study those stories, we can visualize and understand their traditions.

When someone planned for a banquet, about one week before the event, he sent invitations for people to come to his banquet.

What that day arrived, again he invited them, “The banquet is ready. Please come now.”

If someone refused to go, that was rude.

And if someone said, “Yes,” but then at the last minute he cancelled, that was bad.

When friends arrived to the banquet, the servants met them. The guests removed their sandals, and the servants washed their feet and offered them olive oil to anoint their head.

Then the person that offered the banquet, he is called the **host**, met his guests, he led them into the banquet room, and he offered them a place to sit.

Sometimes in the New Testament, Jews followed the Roman tradition of laying on their sides next to a low table. (See the video of this lesson which shows how they did this.)

The most important person lays near the front.

The least important person lays near the back.

The meat that they served for the meal was usually calf (veal) or goat meat cooked on a rotisserie.

While they ate, they talked, told stories, traded jokes.

Many times people invited Jesus to their banquets.

During the meal, Jesus taught the people sitting around the table.

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One time Jesus noticed proud religious men called Pharisees trying to sit in the most important places. Jesus said,

*“If someone invites you to a wedding feast don’t take the place of honor... take the lowest place. Then your host will come over to you. He will say, ‘Friend, move up to a better place.’ Then you will be honored in front of all the other guests. Anyone who lifts himself up will be brought down. And anyone who is brought down will be lifted up.”*  
*(Luke 14:7-11 NIRV)*

Jesus often told stories about wedding banquets, comparing them to heaven.  
Joy in heaven is like a wedding feast.

When people become distracted from God, busy, ignoring God, that is like people who are invited to a feast, but they turn it down. God offers us His love, His mercy, and forgiveness. If we reject that, we are turning down His invitation.

Jesus enjoyed going to dine with who?  
Good people, and bad people.  
Religious leaders, and sinners.  
He ate with both – it did not matter.

**STUDY QUESTION**

Read Luke 7:36-50

The banquet host forgot to do what for Jesus?  
Later, who did it?

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**Lesson 8.13**  
**Sickness, Death, and Burial**

We already learned about ancient Jewish traditions about marriage and birth.  
Now we look at how people cared for sick family and friends.  
And when a person died, then what did they do?

Long ago people had good health.  
But God told Israel, that if they wander from Him, if they rebel,  
God will try to get their attention by sending them sickness.

When sickness spreads quickly and many people die, that is called **plague**.

People are sorry, and they turn back to God.

Sometimes God will touch one stubborn person with sickness.  
If he is wise, he will wake up and humbly ask God for forgiveness.

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If a person became sick seriously, family and friends showed their concern by going to visit. The sick person needed peace and rest, but people bother him.

When a person died, family and friends expressed their emotions. They went to visit the family, show kindness and love, and give comfort.

When a person died, they quickly prepare the body for burial (or putting the body in a stone tomb) that same day.

What do they do to prepare the body?

You know Egyptians had their traditions. When a person died, doctors cut open the body, removed the organs, poured in chemicals, wrapped the body, and it stayed for many thousand years.

Jews did not do that.

When a Jewish person died, immediately the family washed the body, and they wrapped it in cloth. Sometimes they add spices that had a strong smell in the cloth wrapping.

They did not have a casket.

They had a wood board.

They laid the body on that board.

Men in the family carried it to the burial place.

Long ago they had many different kinds of burial places.

Most used a cave.

They put the body in the cave.

Then they covered the front of the cave with a big stone.

Some caves were natural, in the hills.

They dug some caves out of the rock.

That's the kind of cave Jesus had for his tomb.

Large caves could have inside several small caves.

Each small cave had its own stone for covering.

**STUDY QUESTION**

Read Luke 7:11-17

Who died?

How did Jesus help his family?

### Lesson 8.14 Hope for Resurrection

When a person dies, his cold body goes in the grave and life is finished. Right? NO!

In the Old Testament, we read about a man named JOB.

He was very sick. But that did not matter.

Job said,

*“I know that my Redeemer lives.  
In the end he will stand on the earth.  
After my skin has been destroyed,  
in my body I’ll still see God.  
I myself will see him with my own eyes.” (Job 25:25-27 NIRV)*

In another story in the New Testament, we see the same teaching.

Jesus met a friend, a woman named Martha. Her brother died.

Jesus said, “Your brother will live again.”

Martha said, “I know that on the last day, my brother will rise.”

Jesus answered,

*“I am the resurrection and the life.  
Anyone who believes in me will live, even if he dies.  
And people who live and believe in me will never die.  
Do you believe this?”*

Martha answered,

*Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God.  
I believe that you are the One who was supposed to come into the world.”*

*(John 11: 25-27 NIRV)*

The Bible has many stories about people that died, rising to life again.

Jesus Himself died and rose to life again. That is important, why?

Jesus said that He alone is our Savior.

Jesus said,

*“I am the way and the truth and the life.  
No one comes to the Father except through me.” (John 14:6)*

Is that true or false?

If Jesus never rose again from the dead, that would be proof that Jesus was a liar.  
So His bodily resurrection is proof that everything He said about Himself is true,  
proof that He is our only Savior,

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proof that His death on the cross forgives all of our sins,  
proof He defeated (beat) death,  
    He defeated the devil,  
    He defeated sin's power,  
and Jesus opened heaven for us.

That gives us true hope for future life forever with Him.

**STUDY QUESTION**

Read 1 Corinthians 15

Your resurrected body will be like what?

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**Lesson 8.15**  
**Ideas for teaching**

This finishes our course about Every Day Life in Bible Times.  
I hope you have learned a few things about the way people in the Bible lived long ago.

Now what will you do?

    Keep this information secret?

    Loan the book?

I suggest something better.

Teach your church Bible class about every day life in the Bible.

One wonderful Bible story in the Old Testament that is filled with topics about daily life customs is the book named **Ruth**. Ruth is the 8th book in the Bible. It is short. only 4 chapters.

Ruth is a fascinating story.

And almost every verse touches topics that you studied in this course.

    farm work

    raising grain

    harvesting

    threshing

    milling

When Ruth stopped her work gleaning, she shared lunch with farm workers.

You can explain about

    baking bread

    making wine

    and olive oil

    animal skin bottles

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Ruth's story touches Marriage traditions and business negotiations – so many topics that you studied in this course.

If you search for pictures on the internet, you can put them in a Power Point presentation.

Other Bible stories also have these topics. For example,  
Abraham's negotiated to buy a cave to bury the body of his wife. (Gen. 23)

Several stories in the New Testament are good for teaching about building homes.

Mark 2:1-12 has the story about the paralyzed man whose friends  
carried to the roof,  
dug a hole,  
and lowered him down to Jesus.

If you search your internet Bible for the word ROOF, or search the words UPPER ROOM, you will find many fascinating stories:

Two spies that hid on a roof. (Joshua 2)  
A king that fell through his roof. (2 Kings 1)  
A couple that built an upper room on their roof for one special visitor. (2 Kings 4:8-10)  
One disciple, and his noon-day nap on the roof of a friend's home. (Acts 10)

Jesus told many  
stories about weddings and banquets.  
stories about farming.  
stories about money management.

You can use those stories for teaching every day life in Bible times.

Maybe you already know those stories. But when we understand culture and the traditions during that time, we can visualize those stories more clearly.