

Shepherds

Closer to the time of Jesus, when urban life was more developed, shepherds may also have lived in or near villages. They had the right to let their flocks feed in the nearby pastures and would have been hired by landowners who needed help to harvest their fields. When food supplies got scarce near the villages, shepherds would move their herds to mountain pastures in the hot summer, or to warmer valleys in the winter.

A shepherd's life was not easy. Shepherds spent most of their time outside watching over the herd, no matter what the weather. They often slept near their flock to protect it from robbers or wild animals. The shepherd's tools and weapons were a rod, a staff, and a sling. Each night, the shepherds would gather their flocks into places called "sheepfolds." These could be stone walls made by the shepherds or natural enclosures, such as a cave. Shepherds used their rod to help count their animals each evening when they brought them into the fold and again in the morning when they left for the pastures.

HOUSING

- In Palestine in the time of Jesus, houses were made of clay bricks or stones held together with mud and straw, and had dirt floors.
- You average family lived in one-room, two-level dwellings with living quarters separated from and raised above the animal stalls. Jewish extended families often lived together.
- The poor lived in one-room houses built of mud brick on a stone foundation. External steps led up to the flat roof which provided storage space and somewhere to sit. Inside the house a raised platform at one end of the room provided quarters for eating and sleeping. The lower level was used mainly as a stable.
- Some items in the house included a table, a spinning wheel, wooden bowls, an olive oil lamp.

CLOTHING

- Clothing in the first century was much simpler than it is in our lands today. Most garments were made from wool, though linen was also used (made from flax grown in the Jericho area or imported from Egypt).
- Both men and women would normally wear an ankle-length tunic next to the skin, often held at the waist by a belt (which could also be used as a purse). A cloak could be worn over this, especially at night or if the weather was cool during the day.
- Jewish law required the cloak to have tassels attached to its four corners. Each tassel was to include a blue cord and was intended as a way of helping people to remember to keep God's Law.
- For special occasions, a long flowing garment known as the 'stole' was worn.
- If shoes were worn at all, they would generally have been leather (or perhaps wooden) sandals.

Burial

The Jewish people took the burial of the dead quite seriously; it was the way a community paid its last respects to the one who died. The Scriptures laid down quite firmly that no dead body was to be left unburied—even that of one's worst enemy.

The dead, therefore, had a right to ceremonial care. As soon as a person was dead, his eyes were to be closed, he was to be kissed with love, and his body was to be washed. In this washing, the body was anointed with perfumes. Nard was the most usual of these, but myrrh and aloes were also used.

By the time of Christ, the custom was that the body was elaborately wrapped in a shroud and the face was covered with a special cloth called a sudarium. The hands and feet were tied with strips of cloth.

Once this was done, relatives and friends could come to the home to say goodbye to the deceased for the last time. All of this happened in very short order; burial usually followed within eight hours of death. In such a hot climate, burial could not be delayed.

After this brief time during which the living could say their farewells to the deceased, the body was carried in a kind of litter to the grave. There were no professional carriers; the person's relatives and friends took turns carrying the body as a sign of affection. Women led the procession and it was usually quite a noisy spectacle—even in cases in which the sorrow was not that great (such as in the case of a person who had died after a long illness). All funeral processions were expected to have those who wailed loudly and threw dust in their hair as well as flautists who played doleful music on their instruments. Given these expectations, families often hired professional mourners who assisted in the process.

The Jews never cremated their dead; indeed they had a revulsion for the practice since they believed in the resurrection of the body.

Cemeteries were always to be at least fifty yards outside of any town or village.



The typical tombs of Jesus' day involved a kind of cave or excavation cut into a rocky cliff. Sometimes larger families or groups of families would use these burial areas together. An opening in the side of a cliff might lead into a crypt of several rooms used by different families. There would be an outer and an inner chamber, or at least a front and back portion to the cave. In the outer chamber the body would be laid out on a kind of bench or shelf cut into the rock. After the final respects were paid, a large round stone was usually rolled into place (via a groove) to cover the tomb.

These large stones would often be whitewashed as a kind of warning to passersby that the area was in fact a gravesite. This was because Jews incurred ritual uncleanness by coming in close contact with a dead body. Surely this could be endured as an act of charity for a dead relative, but one would not wish to incur it for a stranger. Thus the whitewashed tomb entrances served as a kind of warning to steer clear.

Very poor people, who could not afford a rock-hewn tomb, or foreigners who had no land were buried within vertical shafts in designated fields.

A brief repast would follow and included the ritual drinking of wine and eating of the bread of mourning. For the very closest relatives (such as a wife, son, or daughter) mourning lasted for 30 days. This was observed by the wearing of special clothing, by refraining from wearing phylacteries during prayer, and by not answering greetings in the street.



After about a year, family members would return to the tomb and collect the bones, placing them in a box called an ossuary. They would mark the box with identifying information and place it in the back room of the tomb where the bones of other relatives were also stored. This is the basis of the Jewish expression that the deceased “rested with his ancestors.”

What sorts of food were common in the time of Jesus?

Generally speaking, the Israelites of the time of Christ’s time were frugal eaters. Frankly until about 100 years ago, frugality in eating was more imposed than chosen. The food was more scarce and less convenient than today. It’s availability was seasonable, and all the elements needed to be made from scratch, including hauling in the water from wells etc. Bread was the essential, basic food. So basic was it that in Hebrew “to eat bread” and “to have a meal” is the same thing. Bread was treated with great respect and many rules existed to preserve that reverence. Any crumbs of over the size of an olive were expected to be gathered, and never simply discarded. Bread was never to be cut, but always broken. The poor ate barley bread, the rich the bread of wheat. Barley or wheat grains were ground between two millstones, almost always by women, and this was done at home. From this the flour and then the

dough was made and worked in kneading troughs. To make the heavy barley bread rise, women use very strong millets, and barley yeast. The loaves were usually made round, such that one spoke of “a round of bread,” or simply “a round.” Because bread would become moldy very soon, one would only bake enough for a day or two.

Corn (grain) – Though the Bible mentions corn, it has nothing to do with what we call corn today. Such a crop was unknown in Middle East. “Corn” in the Bible refers to what we call grain.

Milk - Cows milk was rare, and in any case it was not liked as much as the more common milk of sheep and of goats. Since milk tended to spoil quickly, cheese making was very common.

Honey was the sweetener that was used for most things. Cane sugar was unknown the Holy Land. The source of honey was bees, which like today were colonized. Saps from various trees and the thickened juice of grapes (jelly) were also common sweeteners. So much honey was made in the holy land, that some of it was exported.

Eggs - As for eggs, very few of them were eaten. The thought of eating eggs was something brought into the Holy Land only from the outside, especially to the East. It tended to be food only for the very wealthy. Indeed, the eating of poultry at all seems to have come to Jewish regions only after the exile in Babylon (587 – 500 BC).

Vegetables - The diet of ordinary people included a great many vegetables: beans and lentils came first on the list. Cucumbers as well were very much esteemed. Onions were very popular.

Meat – There was far less meat consumed than today. Meat was a food of luxury and only the wealthy had a great deal of it. Poor people never slaughtered an animal for their own eating, except when there was a family feast. Generally when such a feast approached, an older animal was chosen, and fattened up by feeding it grain. Therefore such an animal spent its last months eating well and working little so that its muscles were softer, and fatter. Goats, and lambs provided the most common meat; occasionally a calf (i.e. a cow). The animal was usually roasted.

Chickens were scarce, though pigeons and turtledoves were cheap. Game was much sought after, but generally only the wealthy ate much of it. Deer and gazelle were considered kingly dishes, and peacock was reckoned a great delicacy.

Fish - But for most common people, fish was more important than meat. Bread and fish was a common meal. This is illustrated by the miracle of The loaves and the fishes, as well as the meal at the lakeside in Galilee where Christ prepared fish for them over a charcoal fire. The Sea of Galilee had great quantities of fish; and fish were also gotten from the Mediterranean Sea. Since fish soon turned bad, it was often salted. The consumption of fish was so great, that some of it had to be imported.

Locust - One of the most surprising forms of food was the locust. An ancient Jewish document claims that there were 800 different kinds of edible locust. Sometimes they were cooked rapidly in salt water and had a shrimp like taste and color. Usually their head and legs were taken off. Sometimes they were dried in the sun. After being dried, some were ground down to powder, known as Locust powder which tasted rather bitter and was often mixed with flour to make a much prized bitter biscuit.

Butter (oil) - Butter was rare in use, olive oil was much more common. So abundant were olives and olive oil, that some was exported. Many olives were eaten directly, others had the oil pressed from them at an oil press at home (right). Olive oil was highly prized, and many passages in the Bible hold it up it's a symbol of strength and health.

Fruit - had an important place in the people's food. They had many melons and figs along with

pomegranates, blackberries and dates. Here too fruit was an abundance, so it was often exported as well.

Nuts – Nuts were in some abundance, especially walnuts, almonds, and pistachios. Like today, they were roasted.

As for seasonings and other condiments, the ancient Jews seem to like their food strongly seasoned. Certainly there was salt in abundance from the Dead Sea area, which also helped preserve certain foods. Other common spices were mustard, capers, cumin, rue, saffron, coriander, mint, dill, rosemary, garlic, onions, and shallots. Pepper however was scarce and expensive as was cinnamon, both of which came from the Far East.

Without refrigeration, fish, meat, and some vegetables were preserved by salting, or pickling them. Pork was absolutely forbidden as was rabbit, and any meat with blood still in it. Meat had to be carefully drained of all blood, for it was believed that life was in the blood, and life belonged to God.

Drinks - People drank water when it was pure, the Spring water was to be preferred strongly over well water. Milk, and vinegar diluted with water were also drunk. Juice from pomegranates or dates was a preferred fruit juice. And a kind of light beer was made from barley and millets. Wine was a very important staple, it is said that God himself first showed Noah how it was made. Vineyards and grapes were in abundance in ancient Israel. And the grapes were occasionally eaten directly, but most of them went toward making wine. In Ecclesiastes 31:27 the author wonders what kind of life one could lead without it. Indeed, the vine was a symbol for Israel in the Scriptures. Since wine was considered sacred, it had to be kosher, that is made only by Jewish hands. It was only red wine that was consumed in biblical times; there is not even one mention of white wine. Wine was always spoken of as having the color of blood, and thus it was a deep red or purple color. They kept wine either in tall jars, or in wineskins made out of goats hide with wooden stoppers. Wine was filtered before it was consumed. Like today, there were different qualities of wine, some drier, some sweeter, some considered inferior some more desirable. They drink wine out of metal goblets or earthenware mugs, and although glass was known, it was scarce and expensive. Wine in moderation was considered a great blessing, but the ancient Jews were also well aware that excessive wine could be dangerous. Scripture is full of warnings about drunkenness.

Nevertheless, wine was often had in some abundance, because water is not often pure. When Paul tells Timothy to drink some wine to settle his stomach, he was alluding to the fact that water alone tended to cause the stomach to be sore and inflamed, and to bring either diarrhea or constipation. Wine had the medicinal effect and helping kill water-borne bacteria (of which the ancients knew nothing) as well as cheering the heart.

Food of course was very seasonal in availability. And thus the diet would be affected by harvest cycles. Here is a rough estimate of the harvests of different things:

Mid September – Ploughing time

Mid Oct – November – Olive harvest

Mid November – Grain is planted. Rainy season begins

February Flax harvest

Late March, Barley harvest

May – Wheat harvest

Mid June – Figs

July, - Grapes and vintage.
August - Dates and late figs

The house of Mary and Joseph's family would have had a simpler cooking area, perhaps **a circle of stones with a fire at the center**, or a **small bread** oven. It was in the main room of the house – along with the sleeping and eating areas.

Cupboards were unnecessary, because small niches were cut into the walls – storage space for bed rolls, clothes, small items of food, etc. But grain or oil for cooking was kept in a separate storage area. There was also space for animals and their food-troughs, called mangers.

Twice a day, in the cool of the morning and in the evening, women took large earthenware pitchers to the village well, where they pulled the water up with a leather bucket on the end of a rope. This was the time of day when they talked with their friends, waiting to draw water.

What people ate

Meals were simple but wholesome. Bread, usually barley bread, was a feature of every meal, and women made it as often as needed. In summer, they probably baked several days' supply at a time, to cut down on the discomfort caused by the heat of their oven.

Grain for **bread** was ground by the women on two grinding stones, the lower one fixed, the upper one rotating (see photograph at right and enlargement below). The grain was mixed with water, and then fermented dough, kept for this purpose, was kneaded into the dough, which was left to rise. Then the thin, flat circles of dough were slapped onto the hot stones in the fire, or placed in a bread oven if the family had one.



The main meal was eaten in the evening. It might consist of a lentil stew seasoned with herbs like cumin, black cumin or coriander. It was served with **cheese** made from sheep or goats' milk, **olives, onions** and **bread**. Fruits included fresh figs and melon, as well as dried pomegranates and dates – **dried fruits** were a staple item in the Middle East. **Wine**, water and **curdled milk**, similar to liquid yogurt, accompanied the meal.

Sugar? Unheard of, so most people had healthy teeth. Honey was used as a sweetener, but only occasionally and usually by the wealthy. Meat was a rarity, kept for special occasions. Fish was much more common, and the dried fish industry was an important source of wealth for the people around the

Sea of Galilee. The town of Magdala, not far from Nazareth, was a center of the dried fish industry, and Mary Magdalene may have earned her money from dried fish rather than prostitution .

The ravines in the slopes and the rocky ground were suitable for clusters of trees whose olives were gathered, crusted with large grinding stones, pitted, and pressed for oil. The fields on the slopes could grow various grains – wheat, barley, and millet whose chaff was separated on threshing floors with winnowing.

The alluvial soil south of the village was sufficiently fertile for vegetables and legumes. Terraces built and irrigated along the steeper slopes maximized the grain harvest and could also support fig and pomegranate trees. An adequate water source was located at the western edge of the village, now called the Well of the Virgin, and it trickles along the length of the village, giving people the ability to grow their own food in small patches of ground.

The home was important in Jewish religion. In our society, people associate prayer with a church. In the Jewish religion, both the home and the synagogue were places of prayer. A rabbi or scholar was in charge of prayer in the synagogue, but in the home each individual woman in charge of a household was responsible for the prayer-services held in that home.

Jewish women prepared all the family's food. In doing so, they played an important part in maintaining the 'Jewishness' of the family.

Mary of Nazareth almost certain kept a 'kosher' kitchen. This meant the kitchen itself, and each item of food, was 'proper' for a Jewish family. Certain foods were (and are) permitted to Jews; others were not.

Jews were forbidden to eat specific types of food, and had to prepare their food in a particular way. Their meat, for example, came from animals who had cloven hooves and chewed their cud – the goat and the lamb. These had to be killed in a humane way, so that the animal suffered as little as possible.

As a rule, animals that ate grass were permitted, animals that ate flesh were not. All reptiles were forbidden. Fish must have fins and scales; crustaceans could not be eaten.

These were not arbitrary choices. Each of the forbidden foods had the potential to carry disease, or be dangerous in some way to anyone who ate it.

Although life was hard for the ordinary people of Jesus' day, it had its lighter moments. Feasting, singing, story-telling and dancing all had their place as recreational activities. Games, both indoor and outdoor, were also popular. Archaeologists have discovered a number of gaming boards with playing pieces, one particularly well-preserved example coming from what may well have been the Roman garrison in Jerusalem where Jesus was tried before Pilate

Childbirth in the ancient world

Birth-rates are dropping all over the world, even though it's safer and easier to give birth than every before. People are choosing to have fewer children.

This would have puzzled people in the ancient world. They loved children – the more, the better. They wanted as many as possible.

Why? Because children meant security

- **as protection in your day-to-day life;** the more people (especially men) there were in your family group, the safer you were from an attack, and in the uncertain ancient world attack was a real possibility
- **as workers: more children meant more mouths to feed, but it also meant more workers** to help with the herd or in the fields – and don't forget that children in the ancient world worked from an early age
- **as security in your old age;** there was no pension, no aged care home, so hospitals; the only people you could count on were family members.

Preparing for the Birth

When you have many children, childbirth ceases to be a big event. You get organised. You know what equipment you will need for the birth.

But just to be on the safe side the Roman writer Soranus, in the 2nd century AD, made **a list of all the things needed for a woman's labour:**

'For normal labour one must prepare beforehand: olive oil, warm water, warm fomentations, soft sea sponges, pieces of wool, strips of cloth, a pillow, things to smell, a midwife's stool or chair, two beds and a proper room:

- **oil** for injection and lubrication
- **warm water** in order that the parts may be cleansed
- **warm fomentations** for alleviation of the pains
- **sea sponges** for gently washing the body
- **pieces of woollen cloth** in order that the woman's parts be covered
- **bandages** so the new born may be swaddled
- **a pillow** in front of the woman, on which the baby is placed till the afterbirth has been taken care of
- **good things to smell**, such as penny royal, a clod of earth, barley groats, as well as an apple and a quince ... to revive the labouring woman.' (Soranus, Gynaecology, What Must One Prepare for Labour?)

Midwives

Midwives were significant figures in ancient society. Long practice made them skilled practitioners of their profession. Their duties were not as clear-cut as those of a modern midwife. They were expected to

provide comfort, pain relief and encouragement to the woman giving birth

- **perform rituals and prayers** that would protect the woman and her baby, and keep harmful forces away
- **use her expertise to birth the baby** and deliver the afterbirth
- **deal with problems** or complications during the birth
- **supervise aftercare** for mother and baby.

Childbirth – Delivery

There is no description of childbirth in the Bible. But we know what happened in surrounding countries and that can be a guide.

- Women gave birth in a standing, kneeling or squatting position (probably a combination of these as the birth progressed).
- They used brightly painted birthing bricks to stand or kneel on over a scooped out hole, or they sat on a birth-stool/chair.
- In the Roman world there were special birthing chairs with a U-shaped hole in the seat and supports for the feet and back, and well-to-do Jewish women in the later biblical period would have used these too.

They used whatever furniture was suitable: the nomadic matriarchs in Genesis did not cart a birth-stool around with them, but the settled Hebrews in Egypt did.

Who was there at the birth?

The woman giving birth was surrounded by women she knew and trusted – her relatives and friends.

The women gathered around her, working in shifts to

- massage her,
- support her under the arms or
- wipe her face and body with damp cloths.

She had seen many other women giving birth, so she knew what to expect.

Baby Care – the Newborn

As soon as a baby was born, it was washed by the midwife. She used items that may seem strange to the modern reader: olive oil, salt, warm water, and sometimes diluted wine. Each ingredient had a purpose:

the salt and wine had antiseptic qualities

- the water melted and diluted them
- the oil was soothing to the baby's skin.

Immediately after this cleansing, the baby was wrapped in coarsely woven linen strips.

The strips of cloth (swaddling bands) held the limbs of the baby firmly, though not tightly, giving the baby a sense of security, and confining it as it had been confined in the womb.

We do much the same with modern babies when we wrap them firmly in a shawl. Swaddling bands were believed to promote strong, straight bones as the baby grew.

Diapers in the Bible? Nappies?

Babies did not wear diapers or nappies; they 'went' into small clay pots that the mother carried with her. Mothers quickly learnt to read the signals a baby sent when it was about to excrete, and since it virtually never left its mother's side, this was easier than it would be now.

This is still the common practice in many parts of the world.

Birth Control

Contraception was frowned on by the ancient Israelites. 'Frowned on' is putting it mildly.

Tamar's husband Onan practises withdrawal before ejaculation, thus preventing Tamar from conceiving. God kills him as a punishment.

'he spilled his semen on the ground whenever he went in to his brother's wife (Tamar was a widow who according to the Levirate Law had to marry her dead husband's brother) so that he would not give offspring to his brother. What he did was displeasing in the sight of the Lord, and he put him to death.'

Onan's shame lives on: the modern term for withdrawal before ejaculation is 'Onanism'.

God's first command to the Hebrews had been to 'go forth and multiply'. Begetting children was their sacred duty. They did not just want to have children; they were required to do so.

In practice, this command was not a burden, since a woman breast-fed her baby for some years after its birth, and this cut down the number of her pregnancies.

- **In cases of multiple births, the rights of the first-born were jealously guarded and the birth sequence carefully noted** (Genesis 25:25; 38:27).
- **The new baby was given special care** (Ezekiel 16:4), washed, rubbed with salt and wrapped in swaddling clothes (Ezekiel 16:4; Job 38:8-9).
- **The mother would nurse the baby** (Genesis 21:7; 1 Samuel 1:21-23) unless, probably among the wealthier classes, a **wet nurse** was hired (Genesis. 24:59; 35:8; Numbers 11:12).
- **Apparently the baby was weaned at the age of three** (II Macabees 7:27).
- **On the day the baby was weaned, a feast was held** (Genesis 21:8).

Honor and Shame If we are trying to encourage a certain behavior, we often praise a person: "Great job! You should be proud of yourself!" Conversely, if we are trying to discourage a certain behavior, we say things such as, "You know better than that! You ought to be ashamed of yourself!" These examples show that honor and shame are important in our society. Social scientists who study biblical societies, however, find that these values were not just important but essential to the functioning of those ancient societies. Thus, they are called honor-shame societies. Gaining and maintaining honor is a central activity in such communities, and rules of honor and shame are essential in maintaining the society's social roles and values. From this social science perspective, honor is defined as a claim to worth that is publicly recognized by one's social group. In other words, honor is a person's public reputation that in turn forms the person's own self-identity. Specifically, a person is honored if he or she follows the social expectations of his or her group. Shame refers to the lack of honor—it means social humiliation and disgrace. For women, however, it also carries a positive connotation: shame can refer to a woman's ability to guard her honor. The highly effective role of honor and shame in reinforcing acceptable social behavior is closely related to the group-oriented view of Mediterranean societies. In such communities, the self-identity of an individual is largely formed by the approval (honoring) or rejection (shaming) of the group to which the individual belonged.

Honor, Shame, and Gender Roles Because honor is a public recognition of a person's claim to social status, it is closely associated with men, as men have the public social role in the patriarchal biblical societies. Women have a private social role: their realm is the home, where they raise the children and manage the household. Shame has a positive connotation for a female: a woman's shame refers to her ability to protect her and her family's honor. She does this primarily through protecting her sexual status as a virgin before her marriage and as a faithful wife throughout her marriage. A woman who fails to protect her sexuality is therefore considered shameless—she brings shame on her family, especially on her father or husband. Sirach notes that a father must worry constantly about his daughter while she is "unmarried, lest she be seduced, or, as a wife, lest she prove unfaithful" (42:10). A daughter's shameful behavior shames the father.

Ascribed and Achieved Honor Social scientists distinguish between ascribed and achieved honor. Ascribed honor is given to a person simply because of his or her birth: a person born into a high priestly Israelite family or a Roman senatorial family had an honored position by default. Achieved honor, in contrast, is earned by one's own personal accomplishments. Jesus' ascribed honor was low. He was a craftsman, and thus quite low on the social scale. In addition, he came from a common village family. It was for this reason that his fellow villagers "took offense" at him when he returned to the village of Nazareth as a publicly acclaimed teacher and healer (see Mark 6:1–3). The Gospel writers, however, do try to ascribe family honor to Jesus by recording his genealogy: this shows that he is a descendant of an honorable line that could be traced back to King David (see Matthew 1:1–17, Luke 3:23–38). Genealogies are employed frequently in the Bible to illustrate the ascribed honor of an individual or group. In an honor-shame society, honor is often acquired as a result of a conflict with another person who has a competing claim to honor. These conflicts often take the form of a challenge-and-response encounter. The Pharisees, an honored group of teachers who were among the ruling elite in Israel, often

publicly challenge the authority and honor of Jesus. They challenge Jesus on his teaching regarding divorce: "They were testing him" (Mark 10:2). On his teaching regarding paying taxes, they were trying "to ensnare him in his speech" (12:13). The ruling elite of Jerusalem (chief priests, scribes, and elders) also challenge him: "By what authority are you doing these things?" (11:27). In each case, Jesus answers with a counter-question, challenging the honor of his questioners in return. In these exchanges, Jesus shows himself as the equal of these elite authorities, thus acquiring public honor among the people: "They were utterly amazed at him" (12:17).

Jesus' Challenge to the Kinship System The honor of the family (in social science terms, the "kinship group") was the central concern in biblical societies. A person married, for example, not because he or she fell in love with someone, but because one family made a marriage arrangement with another family in order to maintain or enhance the family's honor. Politics were dominated by the concern of the ruling elite families (such as the Hasmoneans or Herod's family) to maintain or enhance their honor. A woman's honor was to perform well her role in the family as mother, wife, and manager of the household, while the man's honor was to publicly portray his family's social status. The children's honor was to revere their parents by accepting their authority.

Honor, Shame, and Social Hierarchies The honor-shame system reinforced the carefully defined social hierarchy of biblical societies. One's honor comes from knowing and accepting one's place in that social hierarchy. At a banquet, for example, guests with the highest social status received the best seats. If a person sat at a higher level than warranted by his social status, the host might ask the person to move down, thus shaming him (see Luke 14:7–10).

Customs regarding invitations to meals also reflect the honor-shame system. A client might invite his patron to a banquet as a way of honoring him; a patron might invite a client as a way of recognizing the client's services to him. In all cases, an invitation to a banquet required some reciprocal action. If one invites friends, relatives, or wealthy neighbors, it is expected that they "invite you back and you have repayment" (Luke 14:12). In an honor-shame society, even a dinner invitation was a sort of challenge to honor. One had to respond in a socially appropriate way in order to maintain or enhance one's status and honor.

Poverty and Wealth In economic terms, we often think of modern American society as divided into the upper class (the wealthy), the middle class, and the poor, with the majority of Americans considering themselves as part of the middle class. At the time of Jesus, however, it is more accurate to think of two main economic groups: the elites (those who possess wealth, social status, and / or political power) and the non-elites (the rest of society). In Jesus' time, the entire Mediterranean world was controlled by the Roman Empire, and power and wealth was held by the Roman elite and their supporters throughout the empire. Elites In Rome itself, the elites included the emperor and his household, as well as the politically powerful and wealthy orders of senators and equestrians. In Roman provinces such as Galilee and Judea, the elites included Roman rulers (such as Pontius Pilate) as well as native rulers, such as Herod the Great and his sons, who were clients of Rome. Jewish religious authorities such as priests, Sadducees, and some Pharisees also shared this elite status. These religious authorities were not independent of the Roman elite and their clients, however: Herod appointed the high priests and married into the high priestly family of the Hasmoneans. Although the elites formed only a tiny percentage of the population, they had extraordinary economic and political power in the Roman Empire. Only the elite could hold political office, and thus only their interests were directly represented

in the government. The main source of the elite's wealth was their ownership of land—often vast tracts of land. Pliny the Elder (AD 23–79) claimed that six men owned half of North Africa. The lifestyle of the elite was one of leisure and plenty. The elite lived almost exclusively in the cities, renting out their rural land to tenant farmers, who paid substantial rents and taxes to the landowners. In Palestine in Jesus' time, more than 90 percent of the population lived in rural areas, and the vast majority of workers were engaged in agriculture. The Roman economic system was set up to benefit these urban elites. Revenue from taxes was not used for the common good (to build schools or to improve roads); rather, it was used exclusively to further the interests of the elites. Herod the Great used the revenue for such projects as building the Caesaria, a city named in honor of his patron Augustus Caesar and containing a temple dedicated to Augustus. International trade in Jesus' time also focused on the desires of the elites. The Book of Revelation has an extensive list of luxury items found in the merchant ships that traded with Rome: "gold, silver, precious stones, and pearls; fine linen, purple silk, and scarlet cloth; fragrant wood of every kind, all articles of ivory and all articles of the most expensive wood, bronze, iron, and marble; cinnamon, spice, incense, myrrh, and frankincense; wine, olive oil, fine flour, and wheat; cattle and sheep, horses and chariots, and slaves, that is, human beings" (18:11–13).

Life of the Non-Elites The non-elites were people who owned little or no land, and thus had to earn their living through their own labor, often working the land as tenants of the wealthy landowners. There were no mechanisms, such as government representation or trade unions, to represent their political or economic interests. The landowners decided which crop to plant, often choosing to plant cash crops, such as vineyards, olives, or wheat, rather than subsistence crops, such as barley, beans, and figs. The vast majority of rural people in ancient times lived at a subsistence level, constantly in danger of hunger or starvation if their crops failed. Most farms were too small for farmers to make a comfortable living, and farmers were forced to pay high taxes on what they did earn. The worry about finding enough to eat was a very real one for many. Some workers did not have steady work but hired themselves out as laborers for a daily wage. The hired worker was not a slave, but at certain times his situation may have been worse than that of a slave. Even if he had no freedom and was treated harshly, the slave could usually depend on food and shelter; the day laborer was never assured of being hired on any particular day and getting the chance to earn his living.

Debts With a relatively high rate of taxation, farmers and other workers often went into debt. One indication that this happened rather often is the number of times Jesus' parables refer to people who are in debt and are unable to repay their debts. The Roman system of tax collection added to the burden. Taxes were not paid directly to the elite, but rather to brokers who competed for the privilege of collecting taxes in a certain area. The broker kept any profit that he made over and above his targeted amount, which gave him the incentive to collect as much as possible. The penalties for failure to repay a debt were brutal. A debtor, along with his family, might be sold as a slave.

Jesus' Criticism of the Elite and the Prophetic Tradition Jesus was critical of the wealthy elite: "It is easier for a camel to pass through [the] eye of [a] needle than for one who is rich to enter the kingdom of God" (Mark 10:25). "But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation" (Luke 6:24). We can better understand Jesus' harsh attitude toward the wealthy if we keep in mind the social situation of Jesus' day: the wealth of the elite and their supporters was built on a system that squeezed out maximum taxes and rents from the non-elites. Thus, the prosperity of the rich tended to be built directly on the misery of the poor. Jesus' criticism of the elite followed a long tradition of Old Testament teaching. The prophets criticized those who built up vast landholdings: "Woe to you who join house to

house, who connect field with field, till no room remains" (Isaiah 5:8). "They trample the heads of the weak into the dust of the earth, and force the lowly out of the way" (Amos 2:7). Many of the Torah commandments are also designed to avoid ownership by a few large landowners. Deuteronomy says that at the end of every seventh year, all debts owed to fellow Israelites are to be "relaxed" (15:2). Another law calls for a "Jubilee year" every fifty years in which each person would return to his own property, his family estate. The law is based on the premise that the land cannot be sold to another person permanently, because the real owner of the land is God, and therefore all people are really only tenants on the land (see Leviticus, chapter 25). Historically, however, it is unclear to what extent such commandments were enforced. The economic ideal of the Old Testament was that each family should work its own land: "every man sat under his vine and his fig tree, with no one to disturb him" (1 Maccabees 14:12; see Micah 4:3–4, Zechariah 3:10). Economic Status of Jesus and the Early Christians Jesus is traditionally known as a "carpenter" (Mark 6:3) or the "son of a carpenter" (Matthew 13:55). Yet the Greek word used here, tekton, also has the broader meaning of a builder, including a mason, or a maker of tools for farmers, including plows and yokes. Such workers were paid a daily wage, and had a relatively low social status.

Purity The concept of purity is central to the biblical way of thinking, especially to the Old Testament thought world. Essentially, it is a way of looking at the world that divides reality into pure and impure categories. The Israelite viewpoint that distinguishes between pure and impure, however, cannot be summed up by those two words in English. We need to bring in several other pairs of words in order to grasp the wider meaning of the Israelite concept: holy / ordinary (or profane), life / death, clean / unclean, and order / disorder. The concept of purity is connected in an especially close way with the concept of holiness. Essentially, any person or object that comes into contact with the holy must be in a state of purity. **Uncleanness** As a noun, the Hebrew root word tm', is translated as "uncleanness"; as a verb, it is translated as "to defile." To get a better sense of this word's meaning, let's consider how it is used in a range of different situations: Uncleanness is identified with sores or blotches on the skin (see Leviticus, chapter 13). Certain animals are unclean (see Leviticus, chapter 11). Uncleanness is due to contact with a dead body (see Numbers 19:11, Ezekiel 44:25) or with the carcass of an unclean animal (see Leviticus 11:24). Females are unclean from menstruation or another flow of blood (see Leviticus 15:19–30), as well as after childbirth (see Leviticus, chapter 12). Males are unclean from any kind of unusual emission from the penis or emission of semen (see Leviticus 15:1–17). Uncleanness is due to sexual intercourse (see Leviticus 15:18) and especially due to sexual relations outside of marriage (see Genesis 34:5, Leviticus 18:20). **Uncleanness is due to worshipping other gods or associating with other religions. This sense of uncleanness seems to be connected with the concept that worshipping other gods was similar to committing adultery against the Lord.** Uncleanness could be transmitted by touch. When an unclean person touched furniture or another object, that object would also become unclean (A person with an unclean skin disease was required to shout out, "Unclean! Unclean!" in order to warn other people of his approach. Depending on the case, cleansing from impurity and offering sacrifices. The opposite of the concept of uncleanness (tm') is, of course, "cleanness" (taher, in Hebrew). When Naaman washes, he becomes "clean" (taher) from his skin ailment (see 2 Kings 5:10, Leviticus 14:1).

Purity, the Temple, and Symbolism Uncleanness could be associated with moral sinfulness (such as adultery), but its fundamental meaning is not moral. Notice that many of the restrictions are associated with conception and giving birth (childbirth, sexual fluids) or with death (impurity of corpses or of spilled blood). Scholars such as E. P. Sanders point out that impurity is associated with the changeable realm of

the ordinary (birth and death) in contrast to the unchangeable realm of the holy. **An essential goal of the purity laws, therefore, is to draw clear boundaries between the realm of the ordinary and the realm of the holy (especially the most holy place on earth, the Temple).** The “unclean” thus symbolizes not so much evil as it does the changeable and fleeting nature of ordinary life. Anthropologists such as Mary Douglas see a related symbolism in the human body itself. In many cultures, the individual body of a community member symbolizes the religious community as a whole. The skin of the body, then, symbolizes the border between the sacred community and the ordinary, or profane, world outside of the community. Thus, a blemish on the skin, or the flow of a fluid (sexual fluid, blood) from the inside of the body to the outside symbolizes the danger of the “unclean” outside world’s “infecting” or “contaminating” the holy community. The symbolism of impurity cannot be separated from the symbolism of the Temple. Most impurities restricted a person’s access to the Temple or the holy things associated with the Temple (such as meat that had been offered as a sacrifice). “Everyone who fails to purify himself after touching the body of any deceased person, defiles the Dwelling of the LORD and shall be cut off from Israel. Purity is also closely connected with the concept of order. Cleanness is associated with the concern to keep all things in their proper places or categories: an unclean animal is one that blurs the distinction between two distinct categories. The seriousness of maintaining purity and thus protecting the holiness of the Temple and the proper worship of God is shown in the fact that certain violations of purity were punishable by a sentence of death (being “cut off from the people”). One who was unclean must be kept apart from the holy; serious uncleanness must be kept completely apart from the holy community.

Methods of Purification from Uncleanness Water was the main means of purifying a person or object from uncleanness. Immersion pools were characteristic of Second Temple Palestine. They have been found in Herod’s palaces, the houses of ordinary people in Jerusalem, and at the Qumran community. They were usually 6 to 9 feet in width and length, and often 7 feet deep. The pools were cut into bedrock, **and had to be filled naturally, either by rainwater or spring water.** Steps led down to the bottom of the pool. Other purification methods were used, however, especially in the Diaspora, where ritual hand washing was practiced. An Egyptian text refers to Jews’ washing their hands while praying. This may explain why Diaspora synagogues are often located by rivers or by the sea.

Purity and Ordinary Life Biblical commandments require ordinary people to be pure when going to the Temple or when eating food associated with the Temple sacrifices. But the location of immersion pools in remote areas show that people were concerned to be pure more often. It is probable, for example, that women commonly immersed after childbirth and menstruation. Men would also have to immerse themselves if they touched anything that the menstruating woman had touched. Women, however, were not excluded from everyday life because of menstruation. A menstruating woman would continue her daily routine of cooking, household work, and caring for children. Priests did follow special rules of purity. They most likely immersed themselves every day, as their food was food offered in sacrifice and they had to be in a state of purity to eat it. Pharisees and Essenes also had their own special purity rules. Essenes, for example, immersed themselves before every evening meal. The Pharisees washed their hands frequently