

Manner And Customs of Bible Lands

by

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CHAPTER FIFTEEN -

Some Special Events of Domestic Festivity

DEDICATION OF A NEWLY BUILT HOUSE

THAT THERE WAS a generally accepted custom among the Jews of dedicating a newly constructed dwelling is indicated from the words of the Mosaic Law: "**What man is there that hath built a new house and hath not dedicated it**" (Deuteronomy 20:5). No doubt the social and also the devotional elements entered into the occasion. A similar custom was in use in other ancient and in some modern lands of the East.¹

The title of the Thirtieth Psalm reads, "A Psalm; Song at the dedication of the house of David." This would seem to reveal that David celebrated the entering into his house with a special service or festivity of dedication. Spurgeon quotes Samuel Chandler as saying concerning this custom:

It was common when any person had finished a house and entered into it, to celebrate it with great rejoicing, and keep a festival, to which his friends are invited, and to perform some religious ceremonies, to secure the protection of Heaven.²

WEANING OF A CHILD

The weaning of a child is an important event in the domestic life of the East. In many places it is celebrated by a festive gathering of friends, by feasting, by religious ceremonies, and sometimes the formal presentation of rice to the child.³

Among the peasant Arabs of Palestine, babies are often nursed for two years, and sometimes for four or even five years. When it is being weaned, various dainties are given the child to sweeten the gums and make it to forget the mother's milk⁴ (cf. Psalm 131:2).

The old time Hebrew mothers also weaned their infants late. One such mother said to her son: "My son, have pity upon me that carried thee nine months in my womb, and gave thee suck three years, and nourished and brought thee up unto this age" (II Maccabees 7:27). It was probably at this age of three, or possibly even later, that Hannah weaned Samuel and brought him to GOD's sanctuary, where offerings were made to GOD, and he was presented to the LORD (I Samuel 1:23). The Scriptural example of a weaning feast was the one celebrated for Isaac. Scripture says of it: "**And the child grew, and was weaned: and Abraham made a great feast the same day that Isaac was weaned**" (Genesis 21:8). It must have been a time of great rejoicing and

dedication of the child to the LORD.

HARVEST HOME

In the Orient, the harvest time is always a time of great festivity. To the Jews of Bible days, it was also a time of great joy. The prophet said, "**They joy before thee according to the joy in harvest**" (Isaiah 9:3). The law provided two feasts that were harvest festivals (Exodus 23:16). The first of these was called at one time The Feast of the Harvest, and later named The Feast of Pentecost. This feast was celebrated after the grain harvest. It was designated to express thanksgiving to GOD for the harvest that had been gathered. It was a time of rest from labor (Exodus 34:21). Also it was a time of feasting (Exodus 23:16). The second of these feasts was sometimes called The Feast of Ingathering, being held after all the grain, fruit, wine and oil had been gathered in. It, too, was a time of thanksgiving and joy over the harvest. It was also called the Feast of Tabernacles (Leviticus 23:39-43), because they dwelt in booths to remind them of the wilderness days of the past.⁵

SHEEP-SHEARING

It would seem from two Bible references that sheep-shearing was another time of special festivity in the ancient Hebrew home. It was at a sheep-shearing time that the affair between David and wealthy Nabal took place (I Samuel 25:4).

Concerning Nabal's celebration Scripture says: "**And Abigail came to Nabal; and, behold, he held a feast in his home, like the feast of a king**" (I Samuel 25:36). The other example is the sheep-shearing feast of Absalom, at which time the murder of Ammon was perpetrated (II Samuel 13:23ff). These two examples of this sort of a feast would not by themselves indicate that it was anything but a time of festivity alone. But without doubt, in many pious homes it was a time of thanksgiving to GOD for the wool provided from the flocks.

1. James M. Freeman, *Handbook of Bible Manners and Customs*, p. 110.
2. C. H. Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David*, Vol. II, p. 52. (New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1881.)
3. Freeman, op. cit., p. 21.
4. Elihu Grant, *The People of Palestine*, p. 66.
5. Freeman, op. cit., pp. 71, 72.

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