

Manner And Customs of Bible Lands

by

Fred H. Wight

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CHAPTER TWELVE -

Education of Youth

A STUDY OF EDUCATION in Bible lands from early to late Biblical days will have bearing on the manners and customs of the people, and will throw light on certain Bible passages.

SCHOOLS AT UR WHEN ABRAHAM WAS A BOY

The archaeological expedition conducted by Sir Charles Leonard Woolley at Ur of the Chaldees, from 1922 to 1934, has proven that there were schools in the city of Abraham's youth. Clay tablets were uncovered that indicate some of the subjects taught in these schools. The pupils had writing lessons on tablets, and dictation lessons in vocabulary. In arithmetic, they had the multiplication and division tables, and more advanced scholars had square and cube roots, with lessons in practical geometry. Grammar lessons included paradigms of the conjugation of verbs.¹

These revelations together with other discoveries at Ur, substantiate the view that Abraham came from a city of high civilization. No doubt he attended one of these schools. It is certain that Abraham and Sarah were familiar with the laws of Hammurabi, having been taught this Babylonian law code from their youth. The explanation for Sarah's action in giving her maid Hagar to Abraham as a secondary wife (Genesis 16) is that the law of Hammurabi allowed such to be done. Similar action was repeated in Jacob's family relations (Genesis 30). But after the law of Moses came into being, this custom disappeared in Israel.²

SCHOOLS IN EGYPT WHEN MOSES WAS A YOUNG MAN

Stephen has given us the statement that Moses was "**learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians**" (Acts 7:22). A wealth of information has come to us from the land of the Nile to let us know how valuable was the law-giver's education at the expense of Egypt.

Tradition has it that Moses went to school at the Temple of the Sun in Heliopolis. It was here then that he no doubt learned how to read and write. There is every indication that he had lessons in arithmetic, using duodecimal and decimal scales of notation. He must have studied geometry enough to make him familiar with the art of land-measuring. And his knowledge of mathematics would take in trigonometry. Astronomy was also studied by the Egyptians, as was architecture. The Egyptians had some proficiency in medical science and dentistry, and were acquainted with anatomy, chemistry, and had a knowledge of metals, for they had gold mines, and copper mines, and were familiar with the use of iron and the manufacture of bronze. Music was also an important subject in Egyptian schools. Moses must have been well educated according to the

standards of ancient Egypt, which were of a high caliber.³

EDUCATION UNDER THE LAW OF MOSES

The duty of the educating of the youth was delegated by the Mosaic law especially to the Hebrew parents. The home was to be a school and the parents were to be teachers. The regulation read thus:

"And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes. And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates (Deuteronomy 6:6-9).

The feasts of the law such as the Passover were designed to cause the young to ask the question: **"What mean ye by this service?"** (Exodus 12:26), and thus give the parents an opportunity to explain its true meaning.

The Tabernacle, and later the Temple, were meant to be object lessons in divine truth. At each seventh year on the Feast of Tabernacles, the priests were to read the law before all the people. Thus the priests and Levites were also teachers in the land. And then an order of prophets arose, beginning with Moses, and continuing through a long and illustrious line, who were indeed valuable teachers of the youth of the land.⁴

Special schools for the training of young prophets were developed by them, as will be seen.

THE SCHOOLS OF THE PROPHETS

Because of the moral decline of the priesthood under Eli and his wicked sons, Samuel was led to form a school of the prophets wherein young men, mostly Levites, were trained to teach the Law of GOD, to the people. There was such a school at Ramah, over which Samuel presided, and David fled there for a time when Saul sought to kill him (I Samuel 19:18-21). There would seem to have been one at Gibeah where Samuel mentions "a company of prophets" (I Samuel 10:5, 10). In the days of Elijah and Elisha, reference is made to **"the sons of the prophets"** (I Kings 20:35), as living together at Gilgal, Bethel, and Jericho (II Kings 2:1, 3, 5; 4:38).

About one hundred prophets ate with Elisha at Gilgal (II Kings 4:38-44). There may have been that many at Jericho, for mention is made **"of fifty men of the sons of the prophets"** (II Kings 2:7) that went to hunt for the body of Elijah.

These schools were no doubt for the study of the law and history of Israel, and also the cultivation of sacred music and poetry. The writing of sacred history came to be an important part of the labor of the prophets. These young men were given mental and spiritual training in order that they might be able to exert a greater influence for good upon the people of their day.⁵

THE SYNAGOGUE SCHOOLS WHEN JESUS WAS A BOY

When JESUS grew up as a boy in the village of Nazareth, he no doubt attended the synagogue school. The Jewish child was sent to school in the fifth or sixth year of his life. The pupils either "stood, teacher and pupils alike, or else sat on the ground in a semicircle, facing a teacher."⁶

Until the children were ten years of age, the Bible was the one text book. From ten to fifteen the traditional law was the main subject dealt with, and a study of theology as taught in the Talmud was taken up with those over fifteen years of age. The study of the Bible began with the Book of Leviticus, continued with other parts of the Pentateuch, and then went on with the Prophets, and lastly, the Writings.

Because of the remarkable familiarity of JESUS with the Holy Scriptures, we may be fairly certain that His home in Nazareth had in it a copy of the Sacred Book as a whole. Doubtless He loved to ponder its pages at home after having studied its teachings in the school.⁷

THE RABBINICAL SCHOOL OF PAUL'S DAY

In the times of Paul, there were two rival schools of rabbinical theology, the school of Hillel which he attended at Jerusalem, and the school of Shammai. The former was the more liberal school as we would think of it today, and placed tremendous emphasis upon Jewish oral traditions. As a young man of thirteen years of age, Saul of Tarsus came to Jerusalem to begin his training under the great leader, Gamaliel. He graduated from this school to become a typical Pharisaical rabbi. Concerning his training he himself said: **"I am verily a man which am a Jew, born in Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, yet brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, and taught according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers"** (Acts 22:3).⁸

The training of JESUS as a boy had been under the other school, where there was less stress upon tradition, and more upon spiritual teachings of the law and the prophets. In his unconverted days, how Saul would have resented what JESUS said to the Pharisees, **"Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition?"** and, **"Thus have ye made the commandment of God of none effect by your tradition"** (Matthew 15:3, 6)!⁹

THE ROMAN SCHOOLS OF THE FIRST CENTURY

It is now known that there were twenty grammar schools in the great city of Rome when the Apostle Paul first visited the city. Girls as well as boys were allowed to go to school, but there is evidence that more boys than girls availed themselves of the privilege.¹⁰

Paul's reference to the **"schoolmaster"** (Galatians 3:24) of these Roman schools, was formerly misunderstood by many, until papyri writings threw light on his meaning. The individual called in our translation "schoolmaster" was actually not headmaster or teacher, but rather a faithful slave whose duty it was to conduct his master's sons to and from school and prevent them from getting into mischief. Paul was comparing CHRIST with the real teacher, and the law was like the slave whose duty it was to conduct the pupil to the teacher.¹¹

Discoveries of the archaeologists at Ephesus indicate that the School of Tyrannus that {Paul engaged as a hall in which to preach (Acts 19:9) was probably an elementary school, where the

teacher taught for a few hours early in the morning and for a while in the afternoon. Thus the room would be available for Paul's use when he wanted it. Such schoolrooms were usually adjacent to a street and thus would suit his purpose admirably.¹²

1. Sir Leonard Woolley, *Abraham; Recent Discoveries and Hebrew Origins*, pp. 101-103. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1936.)
2. Barbara Bowen, *The Bible Lives Today*, pp. 31, 32.
3. William M. Taylor, *Moses the Law-Giver*, pp. 24-28. (New York: George H. Doran Company, 1907.)
4. *Ibid.*, pp. 266, 267.
5. William G. Blaikie, *A Manual of Bible History*, p. 224. (London: T. Nelson and Sons, 1912). See also "Schools of the Prophets," *The People's Bible Encyclopedia*, Charles R. Barnes, ed., p. 983.
6. Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of JESUS the Messiah*, Vol. I, p. 231.
7. *Ibid.*, pp. 230-234.
8. A. T. Robertson, *Epochs in the Life of Paul*, pp. 16-18. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1909).
9. *Loc. cit.*
10. Camden M. Cobern, *The New Archaeological Discoveries and Their Bearing on The New Testament*, pp. 639,640.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 123.
12. *Ibid.*, pp. 473, 474

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