

### Domestic antiquities

#### Family and clan

The [Old Testament](#) books present us the Hebrews as having passed through two stages of social development: the pastoral and the agricultural. The stories of the Patriarchs, [Abraham](#)

,  
[Isaac](#)

, and  
[Jacob](#)

, picture them as dwelling in tents and constantly moving from one pasture-ground to another. In course of

[time](#)

tents merged into huts, huts into houses, and these into settlements, villages, and cities, surrounded by cornfields, vineyards, oliveyards, and gardens. Flocks and herds became rarer and rarer till the time of the early monarchy and afterwards, when, with few exceptions, they gave way to commerce and trade. As among all nations of antiquity, a coalition of various members, or branches, of the same

[family](#)

constituted a clan which, as an organization, seems to have antedated the

[family](#)

. A coalition of clans formed a tribe which was governed by its own chiefs or leaders. Some of the Hebrew clans at the time of the settlement in

[Canaan](#)

seem to have been organized, some to have been broken up and wholly or partially incorporated with other clans. A man's standing in his clan was so important that if he was cast out he became

*ipso facto*

an outlaw, unless, indeed, some other clan could be found to receive him. After the settlement, the Hebrew clan-system changed somewhat and slowly degenerated till the time of the monarchy, when it fell into the background and became absorbed by the more complicated system of national and monarchical government.

### Marriage and the constitution of the family

In ancient Hebrew times the [family](#), as a social organization, and as compared with the clan, must have held a secondary place. Comparative [Semitic](#) analogy and Biblical evidences seem to indicate that among the early Hebrews, as among other early

[Semitic](#)

nations, man lived under a matriarchal system, i.e. kinship was constituted by uterine ties, and descent was reckoned through

[female](#)

lines; the father's relation to his children being, if not ignored, certainly of little or no importance. Hence a man's kin were the relatives of his mother, not those of his [father](#); and consequently all hereditary [property](#) descended in the [female](#) line. The position of [woman](#) during the early Hebrew period, although inferior to what it became later, was not as low and insignificant as many are inclined to believe. Many episodes in the lives of [women](#) like Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, Deborah, Mary the sister of Moses, [Delilah](#), [Jephtah's](#) daughter, and others are sufficient evidences. The [duties](#) of a [woman](#), as such and as a wife and mother, were heavy both physically and morally. The work in and about the home devolved upon her, even to the pitching of the tent, as also the work of the field with the men at certain seasons. The position of the man as father and as the head of the household was of course superior to that of the wife; upon him devolved the [duty](#) and care of the training of the children, when they had reached a certain age, as also the offering of [sacrifices](#), which necessarily included the slaughtering of domestic animals, and the conduct of all devotional and ritualistic services. To these must be added the [duty](#) of maintaining the [family](#), which presupposes a multitude of physical and moral [obligations](#) and hardships.

Polygamy was an acknowledged form of marriage in the patriarchal and post-patriarchal periods, although in later times it was considerably restricted. The Mosaic law everywhere requires a distinction to be made between the first wife and those taken in addition to her. Marriage between near relatives was common, owing to a desire to preserve, as far as possible, the [family](#) bond intact. As the [family](#) was subordinate to the clan, the whole social life of the people, marriage, and even [property](#)

[rights](#)

were under the surveillance of the same. Hence a

[woman](#)

was to marry within the same clan; but if she chose to marry without the clan, she should do so only upon such terms as the clan might permit by its customs or by its action in a particular case. So, also, a

[woman](#)

might be allowed, where compensation was made, to marry and leave her clan, or she might contract through her father or other male relative with a man of another clan provided she remained with her people and bore children for her clan. This marriage-form, known to scholars under the term of

*Sadiqa-marriage*

, was undoubtedly practised by the ancient Hebrews as positive indications of its existence are found in the

[Book of Judges](#)

and particularly in the cases of Jerubbaal, Samson, and others. The fact itself that Hebrew harlots who received into their tents or dwellings men of other clans, and who bore children to their own clan, were not looked upon with much disfavour is a sure indication of the existence of the

*Sadiqa-marriage*

type among the Hebrews. One thing is

[certain](#)

, however, that no matter how similar the marriage customs of the ancient Hebrews may have been to those of the early

[Arabs](#)

, the marriage tie among the former was much stronger than, and never as loose as, among the latter. Another form of Hebrew marriage was the so-called levirate type (from the Lat. *levir*

, i.e. brother-in-law), i.e. the marriage between a

[widow](#)

, whose husband had died childless, and her brother-in-law. She was, in fact, not permitted to marry a stranger, unless the surviving brother-in-law formally refused to marry her. The levirate marriage was intended first, to prevent the extinction of the name of the deceased childless brother; and secondly, to retain the

[property](#)

within the same tribe and

[family](#)

. The

[first-born](#)

son of such a union took the name of the deceased uncle instead of that of his

[father](#)

, and succeeded to his estate. If there were no brother of the deceased husband alive, then the next of kin was supposed to marry the

[widow](#)

as we find in the case of Ruth's relative who yielded his right to Boaz. According to the

[laws](#)

of Moses, a man was forbidden to remarry a [divorced](#) wife, if she had married again and become a [widow](#), or had been [divorced](#) from her second husband.

[Israelites](#) were not forbidden to intermarry with any foreigners except the seven Canaanitish nations; hence Moses' marriage to a [Midianite](#), and afterwards to a Cushite [woman](#) and that of [David](#) to a princess of Geshur were not against the Mosaic law. The [high-priest](#) was to marry a virgin of his own people, and in the time of Ezechiel even an ordinary [priest](#) could not marry a [widow](#), unless she were the [widow](#) of a [priest](#).

Betrothal was mostly a matter of business to be transacted by the [parents](#) and near [family](#) friends. A distinction between [betrothal](#) and marriage is made even in the Mosaic law, where [betrothal](#) is looked upon as more than a promise to marry; it was in fact its initial act, and created a bond which could be dissolved only by death or by legal [divorce](#). Faithlessness to this [vow](#) of marriage was regarded and punished as [adultery](#). Betrothal actually took place after a dowry had been agreed upon. As a rule, it was given to the [parents](#) of the bride, though sometimes to an elder brother. Marriage contracts appear to have been mostly oral, and made in the presence of witnesses. The earliest account of a written one is

found in the Book of Tobit (D. V. Tobias). The wedding festivities lasted ordinarily seven days, and on the day of the wedding the bridegroom, richly dressed and [crowned](#), went in procession to the bride's house to take her away from her father. The bride, deeply veiled, was led away amid the [blessings](#) of her [parents](#) and friends. The bridal procession not infrequently took place at night, in the blaze of torches and with the accompaniment of songs, dancing, and the highest expressions of [joy](#).

Adultery was punished by death, through stoning of both participants. A man suspecting his wife of unfaithfulness might subject her to a terrible ordeal which, it was thought, no guilty wife could well pass through without betraying her guilt. [Divorce](#) among the ancient Hebrews was as frequent as among any other civilized nation of antiquity.

[Mosaic](#)  
[laws](#)

attempted only to restrict and to regulate it. Any "unseemly thing" was sufficient ground for [divorce](#), as also was barrenness. The wife, however, was not allowed to separate herself from her husband for any reason; in the case of her husband's [adultery](#), he as well as the other guilty party, as we have seen, would be [punished with death](#).

Concubinage, which differs widely from [polygamy](#), was also extensively practised by the Hebrews. A [concubine](#) was less than a wife, but more than an ordinary mistress, and her

[rights](#)

were jealously guarded in the

[Mosaic](#)

Code. The children born of such a union were in no case considered as

[illegitimate](#)

. The principal distinction between a legal wife and a

[concubine](#)

consisted in the latter's social and domestic inferiority.

[Concubines](#)

were not infrequently either handmaids of the wife, or captives taken in [war](#)

or purchased of their fathers. Canaanitish and other foreign [women](#)

or slaves could in no case be taken as [concubines](#)

. The seducer of an unbetrothed maiden was compelled either to marry her or to pay her father a heavy fine. In later times, ordinary harlotry was punished, and if the harlot was the daughter of a

[priest](#)

she was burnt.

[Idolatrous](#)

harlotry and sodomy were severely punished.

The domestic and social life of the Hebrews was frugal and simple. They indulged very little in public games and diversions. Hunting and fishing were looked upon as necessities of life. Slavery was extensively practised, and slaves were either Hebrews or foreigners. The Mosaic law is against any kind of involuntary slavery, and no Hebrew slave was allowed to be sold to foreigners. An [Israelitish](#) slave was to be set free after five or six years servitude and not without some compensation, unless he were willing to serve another term. As was natural, Hebrew slaves were more kindly treated by their Hebrew masters than were foreign ones, who were either captives in [war](#) or purchased.

## Death and burial

The principal sicknesses and diseases mentioned in the [Old Testament](#) are: intermittent, bilious, and inflammatory fevers, dysentery produced by sunstroke, inflammation of the head, fits, apoplectic paralysis, blindness, inflammation of the eyes, hæmorrhages, epilepsy, diarrhea, dropsy, various kinds of skin eruptions, scabies, and the various forms of [leprosy](#)

. To these must be added some psychical diseases, such as madness, melancholy, etc., and also various forms of demoniacal possession. No explicit mention of professional physicians and surgeons is made in the

[Old Testament](#)

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In case of death, the body was washed and wrapped in a linen cloth and, if financial circumstances allowed, anointed with sweet-smelling spices and ointments. Embalming was neither a general nor a common practice. Burial took place, usually, on the day of the [person's](#)

death. The dead body was never burnt, but

[interred](#)

, unless for some particular reason, as in the case of Saul and his sons. Mourning customs

were various, such as wearing sackcloths, scattering dust and ashes on the head, beating the breast, plucking and pulling out the hair and the

[beard](#)

, throwing oneself upon the earth; rending the garments, going about barefooted, veiling the face, and in some cases abstaining from eating and drinking for a short time. The usual period of mourning lasted seven days. With few exceptions the bodies were

[interred](#)

outside of the town, either in caves or in public cemeteries. Persons of high social and financial standing were publicly mourned, and their bodies placed in sepulchres hewn in rock.

## Food and meals

The principal articles of food among the ancient Hebrews can be easily summarized from the interesting description of the land of [Canaan](#) occurring in the Book of Deuteronomy, where it is said to be "a land of wheat, and barley, and vines, and fig trees, and pomegranates; a land of oil olive, and honey; a land wherein thou shalt eat bread without scarceness, thou shalt not lack any thing in it" ( [Deuteronomy 8:8, 9](#) ).

Their meals were undoubtedly of the simplest description, and their table was more rich with fish, milk, fruit, and vegetables than with meat. Animal food in general was in favour with the people at large, but the Mosaic law restricted its use to almost the minimum. Animals or parts of animals designated for sacrifice or other holy uses could only be eaten under specific conditions. In the eleventh chapter of Leviticus and the fourteenth of Deuteronomy, a list is given of a large class of animals which were looked upon as ceremonially unfit to be eaten. Animals, furthermore, were classified as pure and impure, or

[clean and unclean](#)

, and the complicated legislation of the

[Pentateuch](#)

concerning the use of these is partly based on sanitary, partly fanciful, and partly ceremonial grounds. The evening meal was the principal meal of the day, and if knives, forks, spoons, and other like instruments were used in the preparation of the meals they were not used at the table. Hands were washed before and after meals. Neither

[prayer](#)

, nor grace, nor blessing seems to have been proffered before or after the repast. In other particulars the table usages and customs of the ancient Hebrews may reasonably be supposed to have been like those of modern Palestine.

## Dress and ornaments

The materials for clothing were principally cotton, linen, and wool; silk is once, or never, mentioned in the [Old Testament](#). The wearing of a mixed fabric of wool and linen was forbidden by the Mosaic law. So, also, either sex was forbidden to wear the garments proper to the opposite sex. The outer garment of men consisted of loose, flowing robes, which were of various types and forms. On the four corners of this outer robe a fringe, or tassel, was

attached. The undergarment, which was the same for both sexes, consisted, generally, of a sleeveless tunic or frock of any material desired, and reached to the knees or ankles. That of the [woman](#) was longer and of richer material. The tunic was fastened at the waist with a girdle. The fold made by the girdle served at the same time as a pocket. A second tunic and the shawl, which was long and of fine material, were also in use. The outer garment of the Hebrew [wome](#)

[n](#) differed slightly from that of the men, and no detailed description of it is found in the [Bible](#)

. It was undoubtedly richer and more ornamented than that of the other sex. The most accepted colour for ordinary garments was white, and the art of bleaching cloth was from very early times known and practised by the Hebrews. In later times, the purple, scarlet, and vermilion colours were extensively used, as well as the black, red, yellow, and green. Girdles were worn by both sexes, and golden girdles were not unknown. Men covered the head with some kind of a turban, or cap, although it is

[doubtful](#)

whether its use was universal in pre-Mosaic and

[Mosaic](#)

times. In ancient times

[women](#)

did not wear veils, but probably covered their heads with kerchiefs, mufflers, or mantles.

Sandals were in general use, but not among the poorer classes, or among the farmers and shepherds. Worthy of notice is the

[ceremony](#)

mentioned in

[Deuteronomy 25:9](#)

, according to which if a man refuses to marry the wife of his brother, who had died childless, "Then shall his brother's wife come unto him in the presence of the elders, and

*loose his shoe from off his foot*

, and spit in [or before] his face, and she shall answer and say, So shall it be done unto the man that will not build up his brother's house". The drawing off of the shoe evidently indicated the surrender of the

[rights](#)

which the

[law](#)

gave the man to marry his brother's

[widow](#)

. Likewise the modern custom of throwing a slipper sportively after a newly wedded pair leaving the

[parental](#)

house appears to have a like symbolical significance; the

[parents](#)

and

[family](#)

friends thereby symbolically renounce their right to the daughter or son in favour of the husband or wife. Finger-rings, ear-rings, and bracelets were extensively used by both men and





,  
[Arabia](#)

, and

[Syria](#)

were not infrequently sent to Palestine and vice versa. The ships which Solomon is said to have sent to remote lands were built and manned by the

[Phœnicians](#)

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