

*how to study the Bible*

**it's ELEMENTARY**



*#itselementary*

**Pr'me  
Groups**

***"learning"***



## The Point: it's interpretation: discovering answers

*Don't forget to make the announcements to your group this week!*

### Discussion Generators

•What has stood out to you so far from the **it's ELEMENTARY** Point series?

•Review: what are the three parts of Inductive Bible Study?

1. [Observation: What Does it Say? ("Looking")]
2. [Interpretation: What Does It Mean? ("Learning")]
3. [Application: How Does It Apply to Me? ("Living")]

How would you define **Interpretation** in your own words?

[Interpretation is an explanation of what has been observed. We must first determine what the author intended it to mean *to his original audience* before we can determine what it means to us. **In Other Words...** Interpretation is **bridging gaps** between the Biblical world and our world]

•Using the notes from the Point on Sunday, take a moment to define each of the following gaps, and after you define it, discuss why and how it is important to bridge this gap.

- Chronology Gap** [the gap of time]
- Geography Gap** [the gap of space/distance]
- Cultural Gap** [the gap of customs]
- Linguistic Gap** [the gap of language]
- Literary Gap** [the gap of writing]
- Supernatural Gap** [the gap of inspiration]



• **Now let's continue our Inductive Bible Study together, picking up from last week's observations of Acts 2:42-47.** Have everyone open Acts 2:42-47 (YouVersion is a good tool here) and get out the ~25 observations that your group made from this passage...

• Interpretation is discovering answers about the observations that you made. Last week, you most likely observed some words that may need to be explained some more, so that we can discover what the author of Acts (Luke) meant by what he wrote. Fortunately for us, there are many research tools that can help us understand the meaning of some of these words. Using the tools at the back of this guide, assign a person to read/show what each word or phrase meant:

- **"apostle"** (v.43) [IVP New Concise Bible Dictionary](#)
- **"apostle's teaching"** (v.42) [New Testament Survey](#)
- **"breaking of bread"** (v. 42, 46) [Nelson's New Testament Survey](#)
- **"selling property & possessions"** (v. 45) [IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament](#)
- **"temple"** (v. 46) [description] [Nelson's Illustrated Encyclopedia of Bible Facts](#)
- **"temple"** (v. 46) [illustration] [Eerdmans Handbook to the Bible](#)
- **"homes"** (v. 46) [Zondervan Bible Dictionary](#)

• Did you any learn anything new about what these phrases meant to those in the Biblical world? If so, what?

• Now let's put that together with last week's observations: Imagine that someone just showed up to your group for the first time. As a group, explain and summarize to them what you now know about Acts 2:42-47, beginning with verse 42.

• **Read 2 Timothy 3:16, 2 Peter 1:20-21, and Hebrews 4:12.** The idea behind the **Supernatural Gap** is that unlike ANY OTHER book, the Bible is inspired by God and alive! Close your time in short sentence prayers around the circle, praying that God will help guide you to understand His word.



### **Acts 2:42-47 (NIV)**

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

### **2 Timothy 3:16 (NLT)**

All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right.

### **2 Peter 1:20-21 (NLT)**

Above all, you must realize that no prophecy in Scripture ever came from the prophet's own understanding, or from human initiative. No, those prophets were moved by the Holy Spirit, and they spoke from God.

### **Hebrews 4:12 (NLT)**

For the word of God is alive and powerful. It is sharper than the sharpest two-edged sword, cutting between soul and spirit, between joint and marrow. It exposes our innermost thoughts and desires.



claimed to follow him (1 Cor. 1:11f.; 3:4-6), and Tit. 3:13 shows he embarked on another journey. He has been suggested as the author of Hebrews, but it is not proven.

**APOSTASY.** In classical Greek, a technical term for political revolt or defection. 2 Thes. 2:3 uses the word to describe the great rebellion against God which is a sign of the end of the world. It is falling from faith or from God (1 Tim. 4:1; Heb. 3:12), which may be encouraged by false teachers (Mt. 24:11). Restoration after deliberate apostasy is said to be impossible (Heb. 6:4-6; 10:26f.).

**APOSTLE.** The word derives from a common Greek verb 'to send', but there are few occurrences outside the NT where it means 'a person sent'. In the NT, however, it occurs over 80 times, and is applied to Jesus as the 'sent one' from God (Heb. 3:1); to those sent in the past by God to preach to Israel (Lk. 11:49); and to those sent on missions by the churches (2 Cor. 8:23).

Primarily, however, it refers to the 12 men whom Jesus commissioned to be with him to preach, heal and encourage (Mk. 3:13-19). Their main function was to witness to Jesus, and their witness was rooted in years of intimate knowledge, hard experience and intensive training (Mk. 8:27ff.). They also witnessed his resurrection (Acts 1:22), which made them effective witnesses to his Person; he himself commissioned them for a world-wide witness empowered by the Holy Spirit

(Acts 1:8). In Jn. 14-17, this witness is said to be the Spirit's own witness (15:26f.); he will remind them of Jesus' words (14:26), guide them into all truth and reveal to them the glory of Jesus (16:13-15). Their witness is thus not left to their memories but to the Holy Spirit.

For this reason they were regarded as the pillars (Gal. 2:9) or foundation (Eph. 2:20) of the church, its doctrine and fellowship. They are to be assessors at the final judgment (Mt. 19:28), their names carved into the structure of the heavenly city (Rev. 21:14). Their ministry was accompanied by spectacular signs (Acts 8:14ff.). Peter betrayed a fundamental principle he had previously accepted, and was rebuked by a colleague (Gal. 2:11f.).

The NT has little to say about them ruling the church. They investigate churches which encounter problems (Acts 11:20-22), but the crucial Jerusalem Council consisted of elders as well as apostles (Acts 15:6), and church government was a distinct gift exercised by local elders (1 Cor. 12:28f.). The identity of function which some see between the apostles and 2nd-cent. bishops is by no means obvious.

The qualifications for the 12 were a call by God and witness to the resurrection, hence Matthias can replace Judas (Acts 1:21-26). Although additional to the 12, Paul can rightly claim the title by virtue of his Damascus road call and vision of the risen Jesus (1 Cor. 9:1).

There are other people in the NT



and faith in his name. The sermons of Peter and Stephen that are recorded in this part of Acts were apologetic in character, because they are answers to challenges that were flung at the preachers by a curious or hostile audience.

The apostolic preaching was strongly biblical in content. The New Testament had not been written at this time, but the addresses were saturated with Old Testament quotations and prophecies. Peter introduced his sermon at Pentecost with a long quotation from Joel, and he made another long quotation from the Psalms to show the Messianic promise of the resurrection. Stephen's address was a historical review of the unbelief of the nation that culminated in the rejection of Jesus. Both the precepts and the precedents of Scripture constituted the foundation of the apostolic message.

The burden of this preaching was the necessity of belief in the risen Messiah, repentance both personal and national, and the receiving of the Holy Spirit (2:38). It was accompanied by instruction, so that as the number of the believers increased, they were bound together in common knowledge and common action (2:42).

#### *Organization and Leaders*

The first church in Jerusalem was not a highly organized body, owning property and maintaining a strong ecclesiastical system. The apostles, because of their preaching and teaching functions, were naturally the leaders, but the government of the church was essentially democratic. When complaints were voiced that the widows of the Hellenistic Jews were being neglected in the distribution of daily food, the apostles suggested the appointment of qualified men to oversee this part of the church's activity. The choice was made by the "multitude" (6:5), and the new officials were duly appointed.

Much has been said about the so-called communism of the early church, by which a redistribution of goods was made for the benefit of the poor (2:45; 4:34-35). It is true that the multitude "had all things common," but the giving was voluntary, not compulsory, and was apparently calculated for the emergency in Jerusalem where there were many "poor among the saints" (Rom. 15:26). There is no record of a similar system in other churches, although relief of the poor was a general practice.

The meetings of the early Christians, which were held both in the temple and in private homes (Acts 2:46), were characterized by teaching, breaking of bread, and prayer (2:42).

The leaders of the early period were Peter, John, and Stephen. Of the three, John was least prominent, being mentioned only in company with Peter. Peter was the preacher who dominated the scene. He made the opening address on the day of Pentecost, and he defended the position of



revelations He gave to the apostles from heaven. "The fellowship" refers to sharing things with other believers who were all still within Judaism at this time. Two distinctive activities marked the fellowship of the early church. The "breaking of bread" probably included the Lord's Supper as well as a meal in connection with that celebration (see 2:46; 20:7; 1 Cor. 10:16; 11:23–25). In prayer the believers praised and thanked God, and interceded for His glory. The feeling of awe that the obvious working of God in their midst inspired continued among all the people in Jerusalem. Unity marked the believers and extended to their sharing their possessions with each other. They even sold their property and personal possessions to help anyone in need, thereby demonstrating true Christian love. Daily interaction in the temple courtyards, hospitality, joy, honesty, praise to God, and the goodwill of their unsaved neighbors also marked these earliest Christians. God brought others to salvation and into the fellowship of the church daily.<sup>3</sup>

#### *B. The Expansion of the Church in Jerusalem (3:1–6:7)*

This section of Acts documents the continued expansion of the church and identifies the means God used to produce growth. In chapters 3–5 the Christians' witness brought them into conflict with the Jewish leaders.

*External opposition (3:1–4:31).* Opposition to the Christians' message first came from external sources, particularly the leaders of Judaism. The healing of a lame man resulted in the leaders of the Jews changing their attitude toward the disciples from favorable to antagonistic.

The lame man whom Peter and John saw as they entered the temple was a hopeless case (3:1–5). He lay at the gate called "Beautiful," probably either the Corinthian Gate that led from the Court of the Gentiles into the Women's Court or the Nicanor Gate that led from the Women's Court into the Court of Israel. Peter responded to the crippled beggar's request for money by telling him to look at him and John.

Peter then gave him a gift far better than the one the man expected (3:6–10). When Peter healed this man in the name of Jesus, he was saying that it was Jesus who was ultimately responsible for the healing (see also 9:32–34; 14:8–10; John 5: 9).<sup>4</sup> The healed beggar leaped to his feet and then followed Peter and John, praising God. Many people in Jerusalem



cf. Acts 2:17), but Peter undoubtedly is thinking of Jewish people scattered outside Palestine. This universal outpouring of the \*Spirit was reserved in the Old Testament for the end time and was expected to continue throughout that time.

**2:40.** Ancient historians edited and arranged speeches; they did not cite them verbatim (nor could anyone have done so unless the speech was short—rhetoricians sometimes continued for hours—and the speaker provided the author his prepared manuscript). Luke thus summarizes Peter's point.

## 2:41-47

### The Power of Pentecost

**2:41.** Considering \*Josephus's estimate of six thousand \*Pharisees in all Palestine, three thousand conversions to the new Jesus movement in Jerusalem is no small start! The temple mount had many immersion pools that worshipers used to purify themselves ritually; mass \*baptisms could thus be conducted quickly.

**2:42.** Most special groups in antiquity ate together (\*mystery cults, Pharisaic fellowships, burial associations, etc.). Many Greek associations met for communal meals only once a month, however (contrast 2:46). This earliest Christian practice of daily meals (later reduced to weekly) is thus noteworthy.

Table fellowship denoted intimacy, and discussions or even lectures at meals were common. Given the topic of discussion recommended by Jewish pietists and what this text says about teaching and prayer (possibly including participation in the temple prayers—3:1), early Christian fellowship undoubtedly centered more on intimate worship, sharing and learning the Scriptures than its modern Western counterpart tends to do.

**2:43-45.** The Greek language Luke

uses here is language that \*Pythagoreans and others used for the ideal, utopian community. Those who have argued that the early \*church made a mistake in 2:44-45 are thus reading their own views into the Bible, not hearing Luke's message, because Luke portrays this radical lifestyle as the result of the outpouring of the \*Spirit.

Some Jewish groups, like the group that lived at \*Qumran, followed the Pythagorean model and turned all their possessions over to the leaders of the community so they could all withdraw from society. That is hardly the case here, although the economic sharing is no less radical. The early Christians acknowledge that Jesus owns both them and their property (cf. 4:32); they sell off property to meet needs as they arise (4:34-35) and open their homes as meeting places for fellow Christians (2:46). These actions do not reflect an \*ascetic ideal, as in some Greek and Jewish sects, but instead the practice of radically valuing people over possessions. Such behavior reportedly continued among Christians well into the second century, and it was long ridiculed by pagans until pagan values finally overwhelmed the \*church.

**2:46-47.** Temples were among the best public places to gather, and people often congregated there. There were hours of public prayer at the morning and evening offerings (3:1).

## 3:1-10

### Healing in His Name

Luke here provides the most prominent example of the wonders he mentioned in 2:43.

**3:1.** There were hours of prayer at the morning and evening offerings (cf. 2:42); the time of prayer for the evening offering mentioned here is about 3 p.m. (The \*Dead Sea Scrolls and later sources suggest also a third time of



us, and to devour us. But we thy people, whom thou hast called thy firstborn, thy only begotten, and thy fervent lover, are given into their hands. If the world now is made for our sakes, why do we not possess an inheritance with the world? how long shall this endure?" (2 Esdras 6:57–59). During this period, however, the seer or apocalypticist spoke for God. He spoke of demons and angels, dark and light, evil and good. He predicted the final triumph of the nation of Israel. This hope flowed as the undercurrent of Jewish worship.

One other feature of worship that became more prominent in this period was the study of the Law. It was primarily a priestly duty, on which the Hasidim (Pharisees) concentrated. They produced many new teachings and doctrines in the process, notably the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead.

**V. The New Testament Era.** In 47 B.C., Julius Caesar selected Herod Antipater, a Jew of Idumea (the area south of Judea), to be governor of Judea. His son, Herod the Great, inherited the position and called himself "king of the Jews." Realizing the history of unrest among the people, Herod wanted to gain their favor and faith in some way. To do this, he announced the building of a third temple at Jerusalem. Priests specially trained in construction skills did much of the work to make sure the new building followed Moses' floor plan. Most of the construction was completed in about 10 years (ca. 20–10 B.C.), but not all was finished until about A.D. 60. (In fact, some scholars feel the new temple had not been completed at the time Jerusalem fell to the Roman general Titus in A.D. 70.) Most worship activities occurred here.

Yet during the persecutions and exiles of Israel, many Jews found themselves too far from Jerusalem to worship there. Did this mean that they were not able to worship at all?

By no means! Rather they found a way to worship.

Old Testament uses the word *synagogue* only once (Ps. 74:8), many of these informal worship places surely existed during the Exile. The New Testament mentions them often (e.g., Matt. 4:23; 23:6; Acts. 6:9), but gives us little descriptive information about them. (See "Judaism in New Testament Times.") We do know something of the early synagogues from rabbinic sources. We also know that the Law was studied and pronounced there: "For Moses of old time hath in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogues



**WESTERN WALL, JERUSALEM.** The holiest shrine in the Jewish world is the western side of the wall that Herod the Great built to enclose his temple area. The wall is called the "Wailing Wall" here to

more, legend on the stones are tears shed by the wall in sympathy with the exiled Jews.

**CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE**

every sabbath day" (Acts 15:21). Many prayers were recited in synagogue worship (Matt. 6:5). Sources outside the Bible tell us that the synagogue worship services consisted of an invocational prayer, other prayers and benedictions, the reading of the Law of Moses, the reading of the prophets, and a benedictory prayer (Megillah 4:3). Only



## WORSHIP RITUALS

certain persons were permitted to lead in worship, thus Jesus' right to do so was questioned (Mark 6:2-4). Paul taught at synagogues, but he too had some difficulty (Acts 17:17; 26:11).

Jews considered the followers of Jesus to be a party within Judaism. They were therefore allowed to worship on the Sabbath alongside their fellows at the synagogues and temple.

Jesus loved the temple and respected it. He supported it by encouraging His followers to attend it. He declared it to be sacred (Matt. 23:16 ff.) and believed it to be worthy of cleansing (Matt. 21:12). Yet Jesus said that "in this place is one greater than the temple" (Matt. 12:6), referring to Himself. He charged that the temple had been turned into a "den of thieves" (Matt. 21:13).

At first, the disciples had conflicting emotions about temple and synagogue worship. Eventually, though, the Jews and Christians antagonized each other so much that there was little choice but to worship separately. This conflict did not revolve around the format or the location of worship, but the nature of worship itself. This is reflected in Jesus' conversation with the Samaritan woman at the well. She said, "Our fathers worshiped in this mountain; and ye say, that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship." She clearly thought of worship in terms of external features, such as the location. Jesus replied

"Woman, believe me, the hour cometh when ye shall neither in this mountain nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father. . . . But the hour is cometh, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth, for the Father seeketh such to worship him" (John 4:21, 23). Christ and His followers knew that salvation and righteousness came not from offerings and sacrifices, but from obeying God in "spirit and in truth." When God acts and we react in worship, our visible reaction is not so important as our invisible attitude. (Perhaps Abel's offering was acceptable because he had no hatred in his heart, while Cain's offering was unacceptable on account of his hatred for his brother.)

We do not know whether Jesus and the apostles participated in all of the Jewish rituals and feasts. The New Testament gives us no complete account of their activities. But there is some evidence that the early Christians gathered in houses for worship, much as the Jews met in local synagogues. Paul refers to "the church in thy house" (Philem. 2), "the church that is in their house" (Rom. 16:5), and "the church which is in his house" (Col. 4:15). Later, under severe Roman persecution, the places of meeting were even more humble and even secretive. For an extensive account of early Christian worship, see "The Early Church."



possibly Barabbas), and the people were ripe for revolutionary propaganda. Intensely patriotic, the Zealots founded their appeal on the belief that subjection to Rome was treason to God, the true King of Israel. At least one of the apostles was a former Zealot.

■ **The apocalyptic movement.** In this atmosphere the type of literature known as the 'apocalypse' (revelation) flourished. Many apocalypses were written in Palestine from the 2nd century BC onwards. They are

marked by a strong dualism: good and evil. God and Satan, light and darkness, are irreconcilably opposed and on a collision course. The present world-order is under the control of the forces of evil, but the final battle is about to be fought, and then the tables will be turned. God will crush all opposition, destroy all evil for ever, and create a new blessed order, in which his faithful people will be released from their oppression and reign in glory.

## Herod's Temple

A reconstruction at the Bible Museum, Amsterdam; the style and decoration are of course guessed. See too the article on page 253.

1 Porticos

2 Court of the Gentiles

3 'Wall of Partition' (forbidding entry to non-Jews; see picture on page 567)

4 ?Beautiful Gate

5 Court of the Women

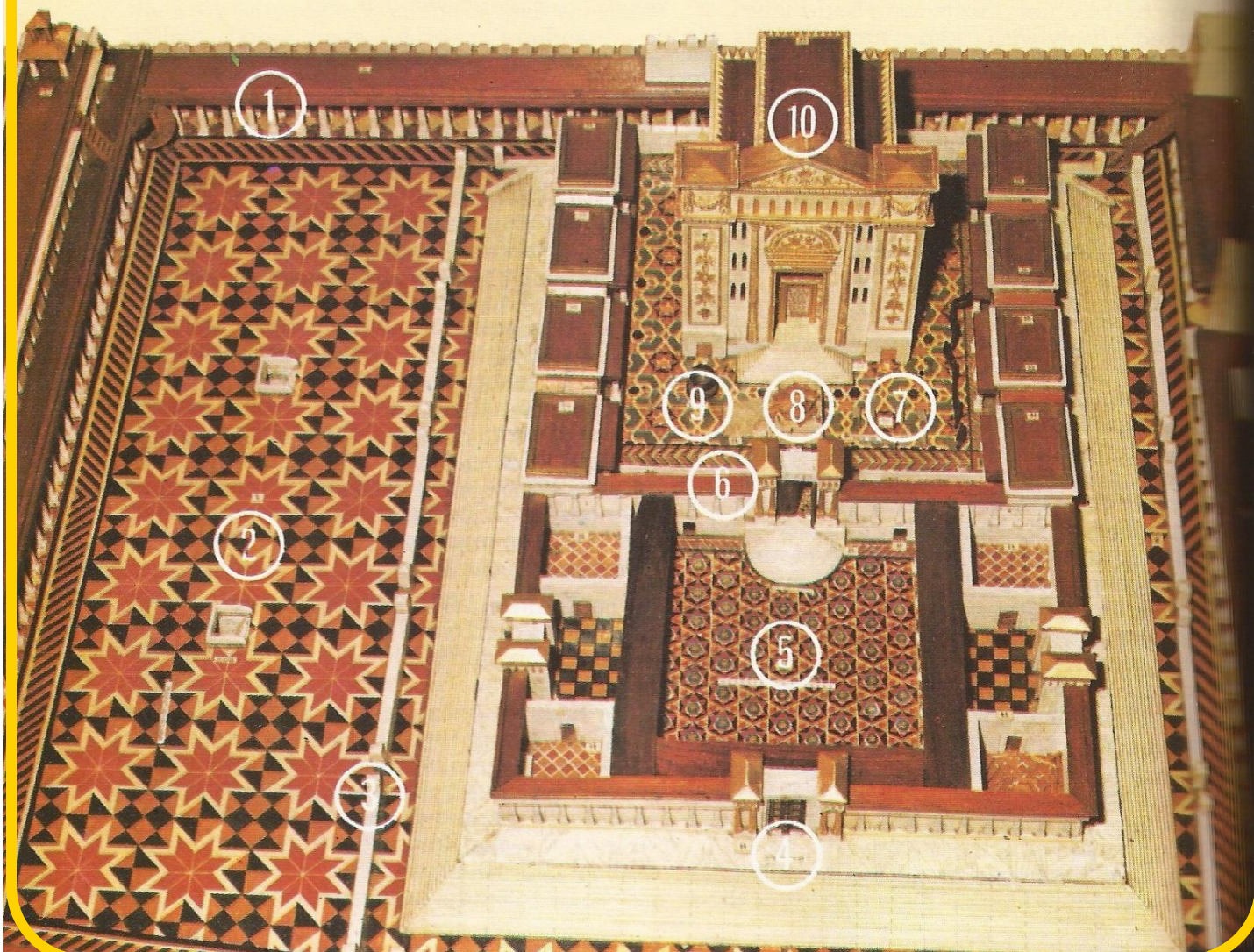
6 Court of Israel

7 Court of the Priests

8 Altar

9 Bronze laver

10 The Holy Place (with Holy of Holies)





We read of no shelters in Eden, for probably none were needed in its mild climate; but Cain built a city (Gen 4:17). When Lot separated from Abraham, he first moved his tent to Sodom (13:12) but later lived in a house (19:2–11). Finally Lot took refuge in a cave (19:30). The law made provision in advance of the settlement in Canaan for the cleansing of a stone house in which there was leprosy (Lev 14:33–55).

After the conquest under Joshua, the Israelites came increasingly to live in houses in the cities and towns of Canaan; though some, like the Recabites (Jer 35:7, 10), continued to live in tents, and some took refuge in caves in times of uncertainty (1 Kings 19:9). House walls were often of rough stone as much as three feet (one m.) thick and often of unburned clay brick (Job 4:19), sometimes protected with a casing of stone slabs. In larger buildings the stones were squared, smoothed, and pointed. To enter the ordinary small house, from the street one first entered a forecourt, with a covered portion on one side. From the forecourt, doors opened into a living room, with two small bedchambers beyond. When sons married, additions were made as space permitted by using the court, complicating the design. Especially on a hilly site, a large boulder would be built into the corner to support the walls, the most necessary stone being called the corner-stone (Isa 28:16). The importance of dedicating a new house (in earliest times by sacrifices) was recognized by excusing a man from military duty until he had done so (Deut 20:5). The floor might be a leveled surface of stone, more often beaten clay. The rich often had a stone slab floor. Solomon's temple had a floor of cypress boards (1 Kings 6:15). For doors there were square openings in the wall with a stone or wood lintel, doorposts (Exod 12:22–23; 1 Kings 6:31), and a stone threshold. Doors might be of textiles, leather, or rushes, but wooden doors fastened by a bar were used early. Stone sill and head-sockets indicate pivot hinges, requiring sturdier construction of the door. A key is referred to as early as Judges 3:25. Locks (Song of Songs 5:5) may have been bolts. Hearths were provided, but no chimney, the smoke escaping through doors and windows. Braziers or firepots were also used (Jer 36:22). Windows were high, small openings with covers like the doors for protection; some had lattices.

Roofs had beams with transverse rafters covered with brushwood and overlaid with mud mixed with chopped straw.

They were flat and were beaten and rolled. The roof was used for worship (2 Kings 23:12; Jer 19:13; 32:29; Acts 10:9). Absalom pitched his tent on the roof for publicity (2 Sam 16:22). Three thousand Philistines used the roof of their temple as a grandstand (Judg 16:27), illustrating its strength, while its weakness was demonstrated when Samson pushed apart the middle pillars on which the structure depended. There were outside stairs leading to the roof of a house and its "upper chamber." In some cases the "upper room" may have been inside the house. In the living room a raised brick platform ran across one side of the room (in the Hellenistic period at least), sometimes with ducts to heat it, and on this the family spread their bedding by night or sat by day. In cold weather the cattle might be admitted to the lower part of the living room of a poor family.

Palaces were much more elaborate (1 Kings 7:1–12). There is a sharp contrast between the humble homes of the common people and the luxurious dwellings of kings and the very rich in Egypt, Mesopotamia, Palestine under the Hebrew monarchy and after, and in Greece and Rome of the Hellenistic period. A Christian community, many of whose members were slaves, would be familiar with the lavish contents of large houses (2 Tim 2:20). While Christians at first continued to worship in temple and synagogue, from the beginning they met also in private homes (Acts 1:13; 2:2, 46). Worship in homes was a well-established pattern in Paul's ministry (Rom 16:5; 1 Cor 16:19; Col 4:15; Philem 2). Special buildings for Christian churches do not appear in the NT. The family had been the religious unit from the beginning of creation; worship centered in the house, from tent to palace. Tabernacle and temple were "the house of God." In the NT the house where a Christian family lived was open to other Christian brothers and sisters to worship together; and when the temple was destroyed and the synagogue was closed to Christians, the church in the home became the sole refuge of the believer, until special buildings were erected. Thus the sanctifying influences of corporate worship were added to the human associations that made a house a home.

**HUKOK** (See **HELKATH**)

**HULDAH** (hül'dâ, Heb. *huldâh*, weasel). A prophetess in the reign of Josiah (2 Kings 22:14–20; 2 Chron 34:22–28), and the wife of Shallum. When Hilkiah