

**TALES AND CUSTOMS OF  
THE ANCIENT HEBREWS**



DAVID, THE SHEPHERD BOY

**TALES AND CUSTOMS  
OF THE  
ANCIENT HEBREWS**  
*for*  
**YOUNG READERS**

**BY**  
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# DAVID

TO-DAY, boys and girls, as we look about us, and see how we live and what we enjoy, let me tell you about some people who lived almost three thousand years ago. That seems a long, long time, as we look back, but there were many people on this earth as long ago as that. Some of these people were called Hebrews.

I am going to tell you how the Hebrews lived, and what some of them did. Now, you know, in all times men must have food to eat, and civilized people must have clothes to wear. So many of these people were shepherds and farmers. They raised thousands of sheep, to use the wool for clothing. There were no factories then, as there are now, and so the people themselves had to weave the cloth for their clothes.

The men who took care of the sheep were called shepherds. Among these shepherds could be found persons of every rank, from members of the king's family down to the poorest people. Even the daughters of the king sometimes tended the flocks. Each morning the shepherd led his sheep into the open pastures. At night he put them into a place surrounded by a fence. This place was called the fold. A rod was held up at the gate of the fold, and as the sheep passed under this they were counted, one by one. The shepherd led them to the wells to drink. These wells were dug in the ground.

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They were covered, so that no one but the shepherd who had dug them should know where they were. The brim of the well was underground, and steps led down to it. The shepherd drew the water from the well and poured it into troughs for the flock.

In the country where the Hebrews lived water was very scarce. There was a wet and a dry season. During the wet season, which was also the cold or winter season, wells were sometimes dug and filled with snow and water. They were then covered over until the next warm, dry season, or summer. In the cold, wet season, the flocks were taken down into the valleys, and in the warm, dry season they were led into the mountains. The sheep were kept in the open air, day and night. This made their wool so much finer.

Sometimes the shepherds lived in tents. Some of these tents were small and were supported by three poles. The larger ones had seven or even nine poles to hold them up. The tents were oblong. Over the poles was a covering of cloth, made of goat's hair. The tent was fastened to the ground by means of cords and pegs. The larger tents were often divided into three parts. The women and children had the inside room; next came the men, and in the outside room were the servants and the young animals.

These tents had no floors but the bare ground. Carpets and mats were laid down and on these the people sat, as they had no chairs. They had pots, kettles and cups made of brass, and bottles made of leather. In the middle of the tent a small hole was dug in the



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earth-floor. Around this three stones were placed to form a triangle. Here the fire was kindled and pots were placed over it, resting upon the stones. In this way their cooking was done.

In the tent-poles were driven nails, on which the people hung their clothing and their weapons. The shepherds took their tents with them, as they roved from place to place. They carried them folded and laid upon their camels, oxen or donkeys.

They also built tabernacles. The four sides of a tabernacle were made of branches of trees placed close together, upright in the ground. The branches were bound together at the top, and there was a covering of leaves and branches over this. Sometimes over this covering flat stones were laid. These tabernacles were a protection against the heat and cold.

What made the people think of making these tabernacles? Why, Mother Nature gave them this idea. They saw trees about them, with the heavy foliage meeting and overlapping, and so they made their places of shelter in the same manner.

There were robbers in those days, and, so that the sheep could be guarded, a watch-tower was built near the tent. Some of the shepherds owned thousands of sheep. They often had goats, also. Not only was the wool of the sheep of use to them, but they used the milk of both sheep and goats for food. At sheep-shearing time the people had a great feast.

The shepherds were not always men, for often young boys were sent out to take charge of the sheep.

## *TALES AND CUSTOMS OF THE ANCIENT HEBREWS*

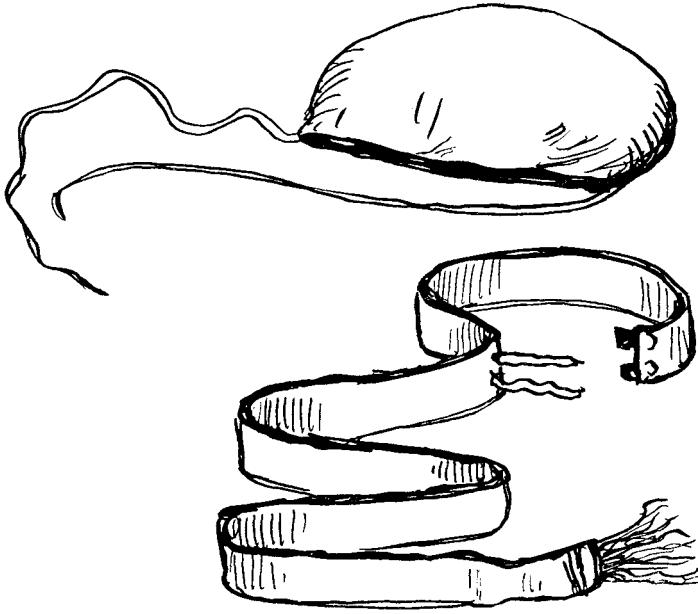
Now we shall hear of one of these Hebrew shepherd boys. His name was David. That was the only name by which he was called. He had been given this name when he was eight days old, for such was the Hebrew custom. David watched the sheep in the fields near the city of Bethlehem. Bethlehem is across the sea, in the Far East.

It would take us many weeks to travel to the beautiful country in which David lived. It was known for its fertile fields and rich pastures. Beautiful trees of many kinds grew there: among them were the palm, fir, cypress, fig, and olive. In the valley the air was fragrant with the sweet odor of flowers, which were everywhere to be seen.

David was a handsome boy, with bright eyes and long red hair. You would think his dress very queer if you could see him now. He wore a white garment of linen, called a tunic. It reached to his knees and was fastened around his waist with a leathern girdle. His arms, legs, and feet were bare. His head also was bare, and he carried in his hand a staff with a crook at the end. Hanging from his girdle was a shepherd's pouch, in which he carried food and other things. This pouch was made of kid's skin and had a strap fastened to each end.

As David watched his sheep there, day after day, out in the open air, he grew to be a strong, healthy boy. He was fond of using his sling, and many and many a smooth pebble was thrown from it. But do not think he spent all of his spare time in this way. He was never idle,

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DAVID'S POUCH AND GIRDLE

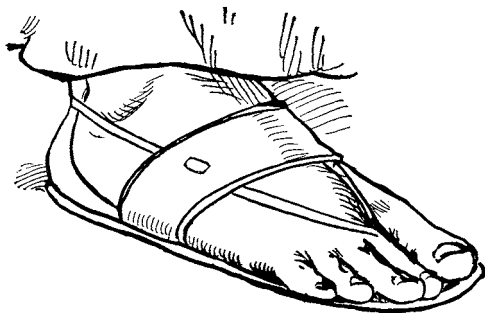
but tried in many ways to learn, and to improve himself. He was alone among his flock, with the blue sky above him and the olive trees, with their green branches, about on the hills. Around him were the high mountains. All this beauty of nature made David feel very happy. So he sang and played upon his harp (*kinnor*), which he always carried with him, and many hours of the day were spent in this way.

David played and sang so well that all people loved his music. It is said that even the sheep listened to his harp and followed their beloved leader about. When he grew to be a man, he also wrote beautiful songs, so that to this day we hear of David as the “Sweet Singer in Israel.”

## TALES AND CUSTOMS OF THE ANCIENT HEBREWS

When David was about fourteen years old, as he was one day watching his sheep and playing upon his harp, a man came running to him. "David, come at once to your father's house," cried he. His father lived in Bethlehem.

Now let us go to the city, and learn why David has been sent for. See, there is a man coming toward Bethlehem. Who is he? He walks along, driving a heifer. When he comes near the wall, which surrounds and protects the city, he sees many men sitting at the gate. This is the meeting-place of the judges. They are talking about the affairs of the city. When the man comes nearer, the judges run to meet him. They wonder why he has come, for the man is Samuel, the great prophet.



FOOT WITH SANDAL

The prophet in those days was at the head of all his people. Even the king always consulted him about his affairs. This prophet Samuel was an old man, with white hair and a long beard. He wore a long white woolen cloak over his tunic. On his feet were sandals. These were flat pieces of leather, bound to the sole of

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the foot with a strap. His head was covered with a band of linen. He carried a staff, and a long horn filled with oil.

The people asked Samuel why he had come. He said it was for a sacrifice, and he told them to get ready for it.

I hear some one ask: "What is a sacrifice?" I will tell you. Whenever the Hebrews wished to give thanks to God for his goodness, they offered to him whatever they thought the most valuable of their possessions. Sometimes they gave animals, as sheep, goats and cows, and sometimes fruit or grain. They gave them in this way: If it were a sheep or goat that was to be given, the man who offered the sacrifice led the animal to the altar. Here it was slain and some parts of it were burnt. When fruit or grain was offered it was laid upon the altar and burnt in the same manner. After the offering had been made there was a feast.

So the prophet told the people to go up on one of the hills near the city, where they would sacrifice to God. And this gave much joy to the people.

After Samuel had told the people this, he went to the home of Jesse, the father of David. Jesse was a weaver of carpets. When Samuel reached the place, he saw a square-looking house of one story. It was built of stones which were cut in squares. The house had no windows in front. That seems strange to us, but when I tell you how the house was built you will understand how this could be so.

There was a door, in the front, and when the

prophet knocked at it a servant opened it from the inside, by drawing back the wooden bolt. Jesse came forth and warmly greeted Samuel. As Samuel passed in to the porch, he saw the usual inscription on the door. This contained a prayer. Here, on the porch inside the house, the servant of Samuel sat on a seat which was placed there for those strangers who were not admitted any farther into the house. Here, also, the sandals were removed from Samuel's feet. His feet were then washed by Jesse. A guest's feet were usually washed by a servant, but when so great a man as a prophet came into the house, the master of the house thought it an honor to perform this duty. The roads of the country were dusty, and so it was necessary to wash the feet often.

Samuel passed through another door into the middle of the house. This part was the court. It was a large square place paved with marble. One could walk around the sides of the court under cover, and watch the fountain playing in the center. If you could have looked in here, on a day when there was a large crowd of people gathered together, for a wedding or some other happy event, you would have seen a covering of cloth, held up by ropes, over the whole court. This protected the people from the sun. All around the court were rooms, and you could have seen into them through the windows extending to the floor. The windows in the back rooms looked upon a large garden behind the house.

You would not have seen any glass in these windows, as they were screened only by a lattice of wood. When the cold weather came, the people could

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be seen putting up a sort of veil of cloth before the windows. You may wonder why their windows were left open, but when I tell you that the Hebrews at that time had no chimneys in their houses, you will understand that this had to be done, so that the smoke from their fires could escape. Do you think these people had stoves for heating, as we have? Their fireplace was a small space hollowed out in the center of the paved floor. In this was set a pot filled with burning coal or wood, and, as I have said before, the smoke escaped through the windows. When the fire burnt out, the heat was kept in the fireplace by a covering of carpet laid over a frame. In some houses there was no fire at all, for the weather was never very cold.

Do not these things seem strange to us? Yet if David, the shepherd boy, could come to our homes, our ways would seem just as strange to him.

When Samuel had gone into the house with Jesse, he invited Jesse and his sons to go with him to the sacrifice. So they got ready at once. They took off their dark woolen clothes. They washed, and then rubbed their bodies with oil. After this, they put on their white robes. White was always worn at a sacrifice, for white meant cleanliness and purity.

Samuel the prophet had been sent by God to choose one of the sons of Jesse to be the future king. So, at the place of sacrifice up on the hill, as the eldest son passed before the prophet, he looked so strong and manly that Samuel said to himself: "Surely, he is the one." But no, he was not the man to be chosen. Then,

as the next son came up, “Nor is he the one,” said the prophet. Nor was the third or the fourth the one, and at last, when the seven sons had passed before the great man, not one of them had been chosen as the king.

Then Samuel said to Jesse: “Have you no other son?” “Oh, yes,” answered Jesse, “David, the beloved, but he is only a boy. He is tending the flocks.” “Send, and fetch him,” said Samuel, “for we will not sit down till he come hither.” And now we know why David had been sent for.

David went at once, for he had been taught—as all Hebrew children were taught—to obey and respect his parents, before all other duties. As he passed along the road, here and there, he saw the people sitting under the fig trees, and he could hear the merry shouts of the children playing in the courts of the houses. As he approached those who were awaiting him, he was a “goodly sight to look upon.” With his bright face all aglow, he stepped before the prophet.

Samuel knew at once that he had found the one for whom he had been sent. He said: “He is the one.” He took the horn, and poured the oil on the head of David. Thus the boy was anointed to be a future king.

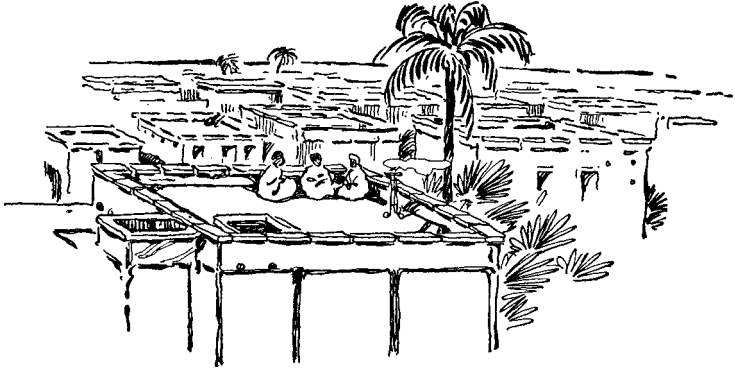
And Jesse and his sons sat with Samuel at the feast. After the feast, Samuel went back to Ramah, his home, and David continued to live the life of a shepherd, just as before.

Now, when Jesse and his sons went back to their home, it was evening. They saw the new moon rising above the hills. They knew by this that the next day



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would be the first day of the new month, and they knew, too, that when the new moon rose for the seventh month, they would hear the trumpet blow to tell the people a new year had begun.



HOUSE TOPS

As they came nearer to their home, they met a stranger. They took him home with them. He remained with them for the night. His beast of burden was taken care of. The next morning, as the man started on his journey, one of the sons went with him for a short distance.

When they entered the house, after coming from the place of sacrifice, they saw the table spread for the evening meal. What a strange table it was, to be sure—nothing but a round piece of leather, spread upon the floor! It had a cloth over it, to keep it clean. In the middle of this was a sort of stool. This stool supported a platter.

The men of the family sat around the table, with their legs crossed: some were on pieces of carpet,

and some on cushions. There were no knives, forks or spoons to be seen. On the platter was the meat, which had been boiled in a copper kettle. Each person was given a piece of meat, which was put on his bread; thus the bread served as a plate. Of course, as there were no forks, people took up the meat and ate it with their fingers. You know, they always washed their hands before sitting down to a meal. In the same manner they ate beans, onions, lentils and cucumbers. If we could have eaten with them, we should have tasted a bit of salt in all they ate.

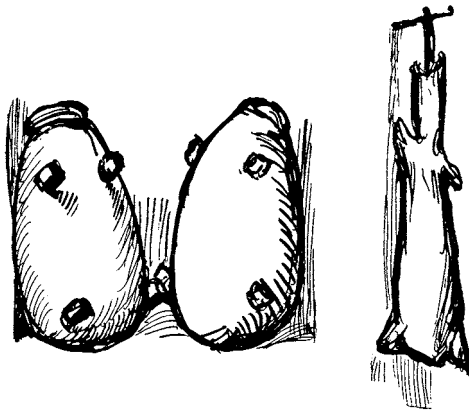
There were also cakes, raisins, figs and dates upon the table. A brass cup was placed before each person. Into this cup water was poured from a leathern bottle.



CUPS

Would you like to know how these leathern bottles were made? They were made by stripping off the skin of a goat or kid, from the neck downward. The skin was not ripped. The four legs were cut off. The holes thus left were sewed up. The hole left at the neck served as a spout, and was tied up to close the bottle.

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LEATHERN BOTTLES

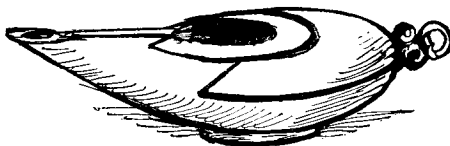
The meat eaten by the Hebrews was the flesh of oxen, sheep and goats. Pigeons and fish also were used for food.

After the meal was over, David went with his father, up a flight of stairs, from the porch to the roof. You are surprised to hear this, and the roof, if we could have seen it, would have seemed the strangest part of the house to us. It was flat, so that one could walk about on it. It was a solid floor, made of coal, stones, ashes and gypsum pounded together. Often the roofs of these Hebrew houses were so close together that one could easily have stepped from one to the next. Some were made of earth, and here and there herbs and spears of wheat and barley could be seen springing up. The people did not fall off, because there was a wall built all around the roof. This was built according to a law among the Hebrews, and reached as high as a man's chest. A small room, in one corner of the roof, was

used for the servants. Think how queer it would seem to us, to see people walking about on the roofs of the houses!

David walked with his father, to and fro, upon the roof, to enjoy the air. Jesse wished to talk to him alone. Crowds were passing in the narrow street below. Jesse announced to them that he would next day have a splendid feast at his home for the people. After praying to God up here, Jesse and David returned to their rooms below.

It was night. The lamp was burning in the room where David slept. This lamp was an oblong iron vessel, which had a round opening in the middle into which olive oil was poured. At one end was a small hole for the linen wick, and at the other end was a handle.



LAMP

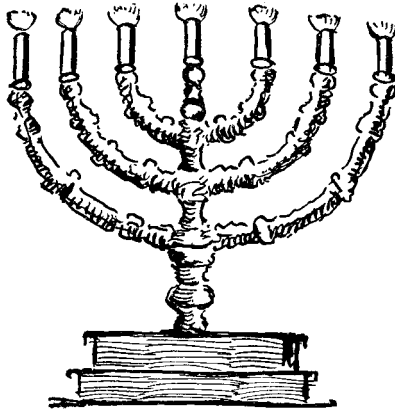
Now the thick mattresses were taken from a box along the wall, where they were kept during the day. They were placed upon the floor and used as beds. The floors were clean, for you know the sandals were not worn in the house.

The Hebrews had, too, a sort of bed resembling a sofa. Sometimes this was ornamented with ivory, on

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the sides and back. Upon this bed were placed pillows stuffed with wool.

After all had lain down upon their beds, a dim light could still be seen, during the whole night.



CANDLESTICK

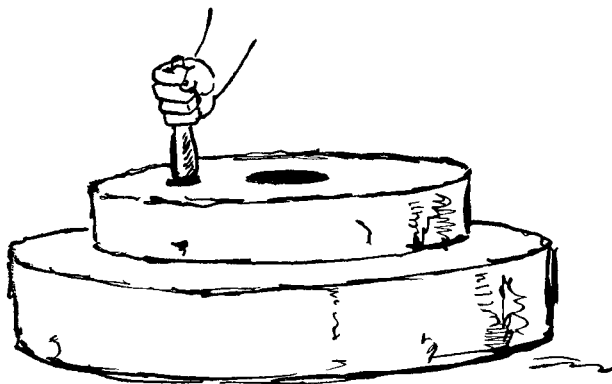
Where was the mother of David all this time? The women of those days did not as a rule take their meals in the same room with the men, unless there was some great feast. So David's mother was with the other women of the home, in a room in the rear of the house.

Here, in these back rooms, we might have seen the women busily spinning, dyeing, weaving and sewing. For all the clothing was made in the home. The Hebrew home was a "hive of industry," among the rich and poor alike. Even the children were taught to be active and busy.

The women dressed in very much the same way

as the men. But their dresses were fuller and longer, and made of finer material, and their under-garments had sleeves. The women were fond of bright colors, and a dress of scarlet was commonly worn. The girdle, too, was of fine woven stuff. The Hebrew women wore turbans on their heads. They did not go out in public often, but when they did, they always wore a veil to cover the face. Gold and silver rings, bracelets and necklaces were worn by them. Just think of it—we have even read of women wearing rings around their ankles.

Besides the making of clothing, there was other work to be done in the home. For there the wheat and barley were ground into flour, and there the bread was baked.



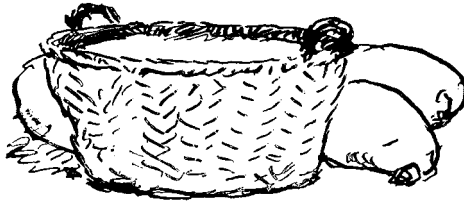
MILL FOR GRINDING FLOUR

Each family had its own mill. This was made by placing two round stones one above the other. The lower one was so fixed in the floor that it did not move around. It was higher in the center, and this high place fitted into a hollow place in the upper stone. There was a

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hole through the upper one, and into this hole the grain was poured. By means of a wooden handle, the upper stone was turned around on the lower one.

Thus the grain was broken up and ground into meal. As David went back and forth through the city, he could hear the noise of these mills in the houses. They were used every morning and evening, except on the Sabbath.



BASKET

Now, since you know how the flour was made, would you like to know how the Hebrews made their bread? The people of that time did not have all the different kinds of food that we have to-day, but in all ages people have eaten bread in some form.

To make the bread the flour and water were mixed in a wooden tray. Of course, each family owned an oven, where the bread was baked. Sometimes, this oven was only a hollow made in the earth. The bottom was paved with stones. When the oven was warmed, the fire was removed. Then the bread or cakes were placed on these hot stones, and the mouth of the oven was closed.

They also had a movable oven made of brick,

smearred with clay on the inside. The dough was put on the outside, like a plaster, and thus baked. The women of the household did most of this work.

Up to this time, you have heard nothing about the schools for the children. Well, there were no schools, outside of their homes. Do you think they learned nothing on this account? No, indeed, for the parents considered it a duty to teach the children themselves.

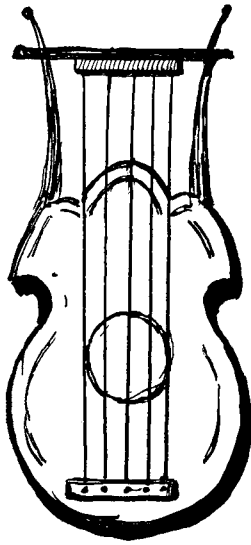
The girls, until they were married, spent all of their time with their mothers. They were not idle, but were taught all the useful things that must be done in a home. They were taught to spin, sew, embroider, and, of course, to cook. They also learned to sing and dance. Usually when they danced, they played upon an instrument called a timbrel. This was made of a round brass or wooden hoop, covered with a tightly drawn skin and hung round with small bells. It was held in the left hand and beaten with the right. The daughters did not go out on the streets very often, but once in a while they could be seen, with urns, carrying water from the wells.

The boys, likewise, until they were five years old, were under their mothers' care. Then their fathers took them in charge. They were taught reading and writing. And here again, how different their way was from ours!

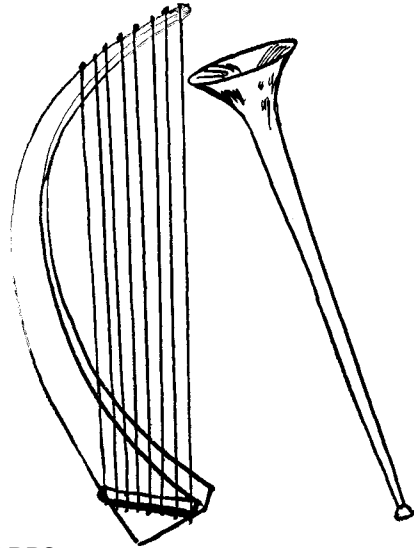
They wrote on goat-skin or sheepskin, and sometimes on sheets of paper made of the papyrus plant. On this they wrote with black ink, using a sharp-pointed wooden instrument called a stylus. The writing



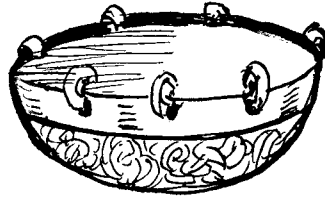
## DAVID



HARPS



HORN



TIMBREL

was from right to left. The lines were short, so that on each sheet there were written many separate columns. The sheets were not bound into books as we have them, but were joined together and rolled around a stick and sometimes around two sticks.

This roll of writing was called a scroll. In earlier times people also wrote upon stones.

Besides this, the boys were taught farming. They practised shooting with the bow and arrow, throwing with the sling, lifting heavy weights, and running races,

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to make them strong and healthy. But above all this, the history of their nation, and the love of God were impressed upon their minds. Usually the fathers and sons talked of these things on the Sabbath, as this was a day of rest.



SCROLLS

Jesse told David about the great men and women who had lived many years before. He told him what they had done for his people. He talked to him of the wisdom and goodness of God. He taught him that the love and fear of God was the beginning of all knowledge.

Now from all this we know that David, as a boy, was taught to be industrious, to obey and respect his parents, and, above all, to worship God.