

The *Oikos* Formula

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It was E. Stauffer who first coined the term “the *oikos* formula” to describe the biblical phrase “he and his (whole) household.” But it was Joachim Jeremias who painstakingly performed the laborious task of collating the instances of its occurrence in both testaments (see *The Origins of Infant Baptism: A Further Study in Reply to Kurt Aland*, translated by Dorothea M. Barton [Naperville, IL: Alec R. Allenson, 1963]). I have pulled out the most important quotes from Jeremias’s book, and I have printed out the texts that Jeremias only cites by reference on pp. 19-21. (I have followed the New American Standard Bible, making only slight changes where necessary; also where the NASB has “household,” I have changed it to “house” simply for the sake of uniformity. It should be obvious, however, that “house” in all of these instances *means* “family” or “household.”)

“This phrase corresponds to the Semitic manner of thinking and speaking, as regards its content (with its emphasis on the authority of the father of the family and the omission of the mother of the family)... Whoever takes the trouble to check the examples in their context will confirm the fact that repeatedly the presence of children and infants is specially mentioned (cf. Gen. 46:27 with vv. 5, 7; I Sam. 22:15f with v. 19; II Kings 9:8; Jer. 38:17 with v. 23), and at times their omission is particularly emphasized (Gen. 50:8; I Sam. 1:21f; cf. Ex. 12:37). ... not simply the children in addition to the adults, but the children quite especially, and not least any little children who might be present...” (Jeremias, pp. 20, 22).

“The phrase ‘he and his (whole) house’ denotes the complete family; normally husband, wife and children. In no single case is the term ‘house’ restricted to the adult members of the house, though on the other hand children alone may be mentioned when the whole house is meant. Whilst slaves are very often not reckoned as part of the ‘house,’ the inclusion of the

children is taken for granted. Indeed, the Old Testament repeatedly lays special emphasis on the very smallest being reckoned in. Since the primitive Church takes the phrase over as a firmly established biblical expression, the statement ‘it includes small children as well as others’ applies to its employment in the New Testament as well” (Jeremias, p. 24).

Old Testament Usage

“I and my house”

Gen. 34:30 Then Jacob said to Simeon and Levi, “You have brought trouble on me, by making me odious among the inhabitants of the land, among the Canaanites and the Perizzites; and my men being few in number, they will gather together against me and attack me and I shall be destroyed, **I and my house.**”

Josh. 24:15 “And if it is disagreeable in your sight to serve the LORD, choose for yourselves today whom you will serve: whether the gods which your fathers served which were beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; but as for **me and my house**, we will serve the LORD.”

“You and your (whole) house”

Gen. 7:1 Then the LORD said to Noah, “Enter the ark, **you and all your house**; for you alone I have seen to be righteous before Me in this time.”

Gen. 45:11 “There I will also provide for you, for there are still five years of famine to come, lest **you and your house** and all that you have be impoverished.”

Deut. 14:26 “And you may spend the money for whatever your heart desires, for oxen, or sheep, or wine, or strong drink, or whatever your heart desires; and there you shall eat in the presence of the LORD your God and rejoice, **you and your house.**”

Deut. 15:20 “**You and your house** shall eat it every year before the LORD your God in the place which the LORD chooses.”

Deut. 26:11 And you and the Levite and the alien who is among you shall rejoice in all the good which the LORD your God has given **you and your house**.

Judg. 18:25 And the sons of Dan said to him, “Do not let your voice be heard among us, lest fierce men fall upon you and **you** lose your life, **with** the lives of **your house**.”

1 Sam. 25:6 And thus you shall say, “Have a long life, peace be to **you, and** peace be to **your house**, and peace be to all that you have.”

2 Kings 8:1 Now Elisha spoke to the woman whose son he had restored to life, saying, “Arise and go, **you and your house**, and sojourn wherever you can sojourn; for the LORD has called for a famine, and it shall even come on the land for seven years.”

Jer. 38:17 Then Jeremiah said to Zedekiah, “Thus says the LORD God of hosts, the God of Israel, If you will indeed go out to the officers of the king of Babylon, then you will live, this city will not be burned with fire, and **you and your house** will survive.”

“He and his (whole) house”

Gen. 12:17 But the LORD struck **Pharaoh and his house** with great plagues because of Sarai, Abram’s wife.

Gen. 18:19 “For I have chosen him, in order that **he** may command **his children and his house** after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing righteousness and justice; in order that the LORD may bring upon Abraham what He has spoken about him.”

Gen. 36:6 Then **Esau** took his wives and his sons and his daughters **and all his house**, and his livestock and all his cattle and all his goods which he had acquired in the land of Canaan, and went to another land away from his brother Jacob.

Gen. 45:8 “Now, therefore, it was not you who sent me here, but God; and He has made me a father to **Pharaoh** and lord of **all his house** and ruler over all the land of Egypt.”

Gen. 50:7-8 So **Joseph** went up to bury his father, and with him went up all the servants of Pharaoh, the elders of his house and all the elders of the land of Egypt, **and all the house of Joseph** and his brothers and his father’s house; they left only their little ones and their flocks and their herds in the land of Goshen.

Ex. 1:1 Now these are the names of the sons of Israel who came to Egypt with Jacob; they came **each one with his house**.

Lev. 16:6 Then Aaron shall offer the bull for the sin offering which is for himself, that he may make atonement **for himself and for his house**.

Lev. 16:11 Then Aaron shall offer the bull of the sin offering which is for himself, and make atonement **for himself and for his house**, and he shall slaughter the bull of the sin offering which is for himself.

Lev. 16:17 When he goes in to make atonement in the holy place, no one shall be in the tent of meeting until he comes out, that he may make atonement **for himself and for his house** and for all the assembly of Israel.

Deut. 6:22 Moreover, the LORD showed great and distressing signs and wonders before our eyes against Egypt, **Pharaoh and all his house**.

1 Sam. 1:21 Then the man **Elkanah** went up **with all his house** to offer to the LORD the yearly sacrifice and pay his vow.

1 Sam. 27:3 And David lived with Achish at Gath, he and his men, **each with his house**, even David with his two wives, Ahinoam the Jezreelitess, and Abigail the Carmelitess, Nabal’s widow.

2 Sam. 2:3 And David brought up his men who were with him, **each with his house**; and they lived in the cities of Hebron.

2 Sam. 6:11 Thus the ark of the LORD remained in the house of Obed-edom the Gittite three months, and the LORD blessed **Obed-edom and all his house**.

2 Sam. 6:21 So David said to Michal, “It was before the LORD, who chose me **above your father and above all his house**, to appoint me ruler over the people of the LORD, over Israel; therefore I will celebrate before the LORD.”

2 Sam. 9:9 Then the king called Saul’s servant Ziba, and said to him, “All that belonged **to Saul and to all his house** I have given to your master’s grandson.”

2 Sam. 15:16 So **the king** went out **and all his house with him**. But the king left ten concubines to keep the house.

2 Sam. 19:41 And behold, all the men of Israel came to the king and said to the king, “Why had our brothers the men of Judah stolen you away, and brought **the king and his house** and all David’s men with him over the Jordan?”

2 Sam. 21:1 Now there was a famine in the days of David for three years, year after year; and David sought the presence of the LORD. And the LORD said, “It is **for Saul and his bloody house**, because he put the Gibeonites to death.”

2 Sam. 21:4 Then the Gibeonites said to him, “We have no concern of silver or gold with **Saul or his house**, nor is it for us to put any man to death in Israel.” And he said, “I will do for you whatever you say.”

1 Kings 16:7 Moreover, the word of the LORD through the prophet Jehu the son of Hanani also came against **Baasha and his house**, both because of all the evil which he did in the sight of the LORD....

“You and your houses”

Gen. 45:18 and take **your father and your houses** and come to me, and I will give you the best of the land of Egypt and you shall eat the fat of the land.

Num. 18:31 And you may eat it anywhere, **you and your houses**, for it is your compensation in return for your service in the tent of meeting.

Deut. 12:7 There also **you and your houses** shall eat before the LORD your God, and rejoice in all your undertakings in which the LORD your God has blessed you.

“I and the (whole) house of my father”

Gen. 46:31 And Joseph said to his brothers and to his father’s house, “I will go up and tell Pharaoh, and will say to him, ‘**My brothers and my father’s house**, who were in the land of Canaan, have come to me.’”

1 Sam. 22:15 “Did I just begin to inquire of God for him today? Far be it from me! Do not let the king impute anything **to his servant or to any of the house of my father**, for your servant knows nothing at all of this whole affair.”

2 Sam. 14:9 And the woman of Tekoa said to the king, “O my lord, the king, the iniquity is on **me and my father’s house**, but the king and his throne are guiltless.”

1 Kings 2:31 And the king said to him, “Do as he has spoken and fall upon him and bury him, that you may remove **from me and from my father’s house** the blood which Joab shed without cause.”

Neh. 1:6 Let Thine ear now be attentive and Thine eyes open to hear the prayer of Thy servant which I am praying before Thee now, day and night, on behalf of the sons of Israel Thy servants, confessing the sins of the sons of Israel which we have sinned against Thee; **I and my father’s house** have sinned.

“You and the (whole) house of your father”

Num. 18:1 So the LORD said to Aaron, “**You and your sons and your father’s house with you** shall bear the guilt in connection with the sanctuary; and you and your sons with you shall bear the guilt in connection with your priesthood.”

Josh. 2:18 ... unless, when we come into the land, you tie this cord of scarlet thread in the window through which you let us down, and gather to yourself into the house **your father and your mother and your brothers and all your father’s house.**

Judg. 14:15 Then it came about on the fourth day that they said to Samson’s wife, “Entice your husband, that he may tell us the riddle, lest we burn **you and your father’s house** with fire. Have you invited us to impoverish us? Is this not so?”

1 Sam. 2:30 “Therefore the LORD God of Israel declares, ‘I did indeed say that **your house and the house of your father** should walk before Me forever’; but now the LORD declares, ‘Far be it from Me — for those who honor Me I will honor, and those who despise Me will be lightly esteemed.’”

1 Sam. 2:31 Behold, the days are coming when I will break **your strength and the strength of your father’s house** so that there will not be an old man in your house.

1 Sam. 9:20 “And as for your donkeys which were lost three days ago, do not set your mind on them, for they have been found. And for whom is all that is desirable in Israel? Is it not **for you and for all your father’s house?**”

1 Sam. 22:16 But the king said, “You shall surely die, Ahimelech, **you and all your father’s house!**”

1 Kings 18:18 And he said, “I have not troubled Israel, but **you and your father’s house** have, because you have forsaken the commandments of the LORD, and you have followed the Baals.”

Esth. 4:14 “For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place and **you and your father’s house** will perish. And who knows whether you have not attained royalty for such a time as this?”

Is. 7:17 “The LORD will bring **on you**, on your people, **and on your father’s house** such days as have never come since the day that Ephraim separated from Judah, the king of Assyria.”

Jer. 12:6 “For even **your brothers and the house of your father**, Even they have dealt treacherously with you, Even they have cried aloud after you. Do not believe them, although they may say nice things to you.”

“He and the (whole) house of his father”

Gen. 46:31 see above

Gen. 47:12 And Joseph provided **his father and his brothers and all his father’s house** with food, according to **their little ones**.

Gen. 50:8 ... and **all the house of Joseph and his brothers and his father’s house**; they left only **their little ones** and their flocks and their herds in the land of Goshen.

Gen. 50:22 Now Joseph stayed in Egypt, **he and his father’s house**, and Joseph lived one hundred and ten years.

Judg. 16:31 Then **his brothers and all his father’s house** came down, took him, brought him up, and buried him between Zorah and Eshtaol in the tomb of Manoah his father.

1 Sam. 22:1 So David departed from there and escaped to the cave of Adullam; and when **his brothers and all his father’s house** heard of it, they went down there to him.

“She and her (father’s) house”

Josh. 6:25 However, **Rahab** the harlot **and her father’s house** and all she had, Joshua spared; and she has lived in the midst of Israel to this day, for she hid the messengers whom Joshua sent to spy out Jericho.

Judg. 15:6 (LXX) Then the Philistines said, “Who did this?” And they said, “Samson, the son-in-law of the Timnite, because he took his wife and gave her to his companion.” So the Philistines came up and burned **her father’s house and her** and her father with fire.

2 Kings 8:2 So the woman arose and did according to the word of the man of God, and **she went with her house** and sojourned in the land of the Philistines seven years.

New Testament Usage

“I have not found in secular Greek usage any examples of ‘house’ referring to ‘adults exclusively.’ As regards the phrase of the type ‘N.N. and his house’ no literary examples are found in the dictionaries in general use.... In view of the dissimilarities of the New Testament phrase ‘he and his house’ to secular Greek ... and its agreement with the Old Testament and LXX usage there can be no doubt that it represents a heritage from biblical language” (Jeremias, pp. 17, 21).

Verses marked with an asterisk are also instances of household baptisms.

John 4:53 So the father knew that it was at that hour in which Jesus said to him, “Your son lives”; and **he himself** believed, **and his whole house**.

Acts 10:2 ... a devout man, and one who feared God **with all his house**, and gave many alms to the Jewish people, and prayed to God continually.

*Acts 11:14-18 “And [Cornelius] reported to us how he had seen the angel standing in his house, and saying, ‘Send to Joppa, and have Simon, who is also called Peter, brought here;

and he shall speak words to you by which you will be saved, **you and all your house.**’ And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them, just as He did upon us at the beginning. And I remembered the word of the Lord, how He used to say, ‘John baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’ If God therefore gave to them the same gift as He gave to us also after believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God’s way?” [Acts 10:47-48 Then Peter answered, “Surely no one can refuse the water for these to be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we did, can he?” And he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ.]

*Acts 16:14-15 And a certain woman named **Lydia**, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple fabrics, a worshiper of God, was listening; and the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul. And when **she and her house** had been baptized, she urged us, saying, “If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house and stay.” And she prevailed upon us.

Acts 16:31 And they said, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you shall be saved, **you and your house.**”

Acts 16:32 And they spoke the word of the Lord to him **together with all who were in his house.**

*Acts 16:33 And he took them that very hour of the night and washed their wounds, and immediately he was baptized, **he and all his house.**

Acts 16:34 And he brought them into his house and set food before them, and rejoiced greatly, having believed in God **with his whole house.**

*Acts 18:8 And Crispus, the leader of the synagogue, believed in the Lord **with all his house**, and many of the Corinthians when they heard were believing and being baptized.

Instances of household conversion where the *oikos* formula is not used

Matt. 10:12-14 And as you enter the **house**, give it your greeting. And if the house is worthy, let your greeting of peace come upon it; but if it is not worthy, let your greeting of peace return to you. And whoever does not receive you, nor heed your words, as you go out of that house or that city, shake off the dust of your feet.

Luke 19:9 And Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this **house**, because he, too, is a son of Abraham.”

Acts 2:38-39 And Peter said to them, “Repent, and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for **you and your children**, and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God shall call to Himself.”

*1 Cor. 1:16 Now I did baptize also the **house** of Stephanas; beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized any other.

2 Tim. 1:16 The Lord grant mercy to the **house** of Onesiphorus for he often refreshed me, and was not ashamed of my chains.

Heb. 11:7 By faith Noah, being warned by God about things not yet seen, in reverence prepared an ark for the salvation of his **house**, by which he condemned the world, and became an heir of the righteousness which is according to faith.

Heb. 11:9 By faith he lived as an alien in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, **fellow heirs** of the same promise.

*All five [six, if Gaius is included] recorded instances of household baptism in NT:

1. The household of Cornelius (Acts 10:44-48; 11:13-18)
2. The household of Lydia (Acts 16:13-15)
3. The household of the Philippian jailor (Acts 16:30-34)
4. The household of Crispus (Acts 18:8; 1 Cor. 1:14)
5. The household of Stephanus (1 Cor. 1:16)
6. The household of Gaius (1 Cor. 1:14 – by implication)

“The relevant datum is not the number of baptisms that occurred but the number of occurrences that were recorded. Excluding the baptism of John and of Jesus’ disciples, this latter count is a modest twelve. That three or perhaps four of these involved ‘households’ shows that the practice of baptizing households must have been rather frequent in apostolic times; and it is indeed true that many of those households must have included children and infants ... Not that there were infants and small children in each case of recorded household baptism; but under no circumstance could Luke have used the ‘household formula’ had he wished to say that only adults were baptized” (Baptist theologian, Paul K. Jewett, correctly summarizing Jeremias’s argument; *Infant Baptism and the Covenant of Grace* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978], pp. 48, 52). Jewett says “three or perhaps four” because he ignores the conversion/baptism of the households of Crispus and Gaius, and discounts that of the household of Cornelius.

“In the New Testament passages concerning the salvation, conversion, or baptism of a house the children of every age must be included, firstly because ... ‘house’ can be supplemented by ‘all, whole’ or replaced by ‘all who are his, with-all-the-house;’ secondly because in several passages the customary formula ‘he and his (whole) house’ is found, which in the Old Testament usage ... includes children, in fact has them particularly in view” (Jeremias, p. 16).