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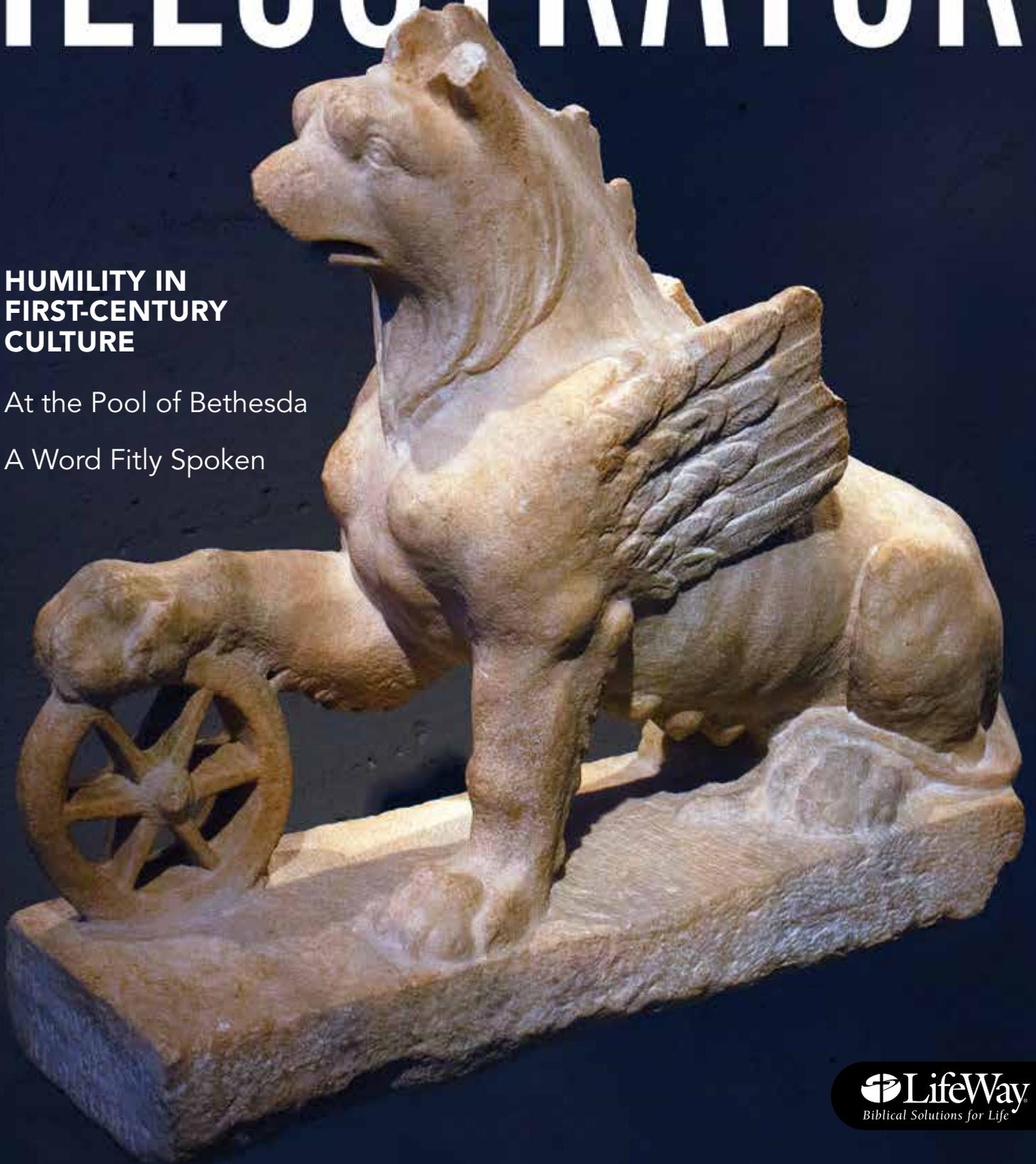
volume 46 number 4 summer 2020

ILLUSTRATOR

HUMILITY IN FIRST-CENTURY CULTURE

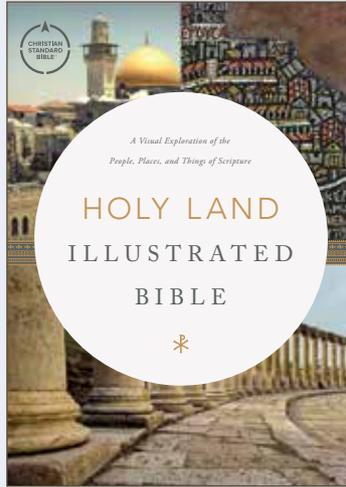
At the Pool of Bethesda

A Word Fitly Spoken



IT BEGAN WITH A DREAM. In the early 1970s, leaders of what is now LifeWay responded to years of requests from people who wanted an in-depth resource for the serious Bible student. Personnel who worked to produce Bible study resources held brainstorming sessions. Ideas were presented, altered, amended, and refined. Their work resulted in the birth of a new magazine, the *Sunday School Lesson Illustrator*. Some years later, its name was changed to *Biblical Illustrator*.

The first issue came out in Fall 1974. Nobel Brown was the magazine's first editor. In his first editorial he wrote, "We commend the *Sunday School Lesson Illustrator* to you as an effective tool for enriching your personal Bible study."



For over forty-five years, this magazine has provided in-depth articles and images that help enrich the reader's personal Bible study. In describing the magazine we have said, "The real-estate of the pages are half words and half images, thus we are truly Biblical-and-Illustrator."

A New Dream

A couple of years ago, a new and additional idea began to percolate. How about a Bible that features *Biblical Illustrator* articles? How useful would such a Bible be? Could this be

a resource that would further enrich people's personal Bible study?

We gathered, talked, planned, and prayed. What we envisioned was a Bible that would include the helpful information that you have come to expect from *Biblical Illustrator* magazine. That meant a Bible that featured *Illustrator* articles PLUS the helpful photos, maps, and stand-alone information boxes that are regularly featured in the magazine.

A new study Bible began to take shape. But what would we call it? Having discussed various possibilities, the name was selected, the "Holy Land Illustrated Bible."

The Bible, which is going to be released this September, will feature over 275 *Biblical Illustrator* articles, each strategically placed



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a long-side the text that it supports. These articles have come directly from the pages of the magazine, written by the scholars whose names and expertise you have come to respect and appreciate. And true to the intent in the planning stage, the Holy Land Illustrated Bible will have over 1,200 photos plus maps and stand-alone information boxes—each of which will enhance your Scripture study.

Some Pertinent Questions

(1) *Does this mean that the magazine is going away?*

No, not at all. The magazine will continue each quarter as it has, with the scholarly and helpful information you have come to appreciate in *Biblical Illustrator*.

(2) *When did you say the Bible is coming out?*

The Bible will be available in September 2020.

(3) *Will the Bible be available in different styles?*

Yes, they'll be available in a wide variety—from hard-back to fine leather, some indexed and others, not.

(4) *Where can I get a Holy Land Illustrated Bible?*

You can go to LifeWay.com and type "Holy Land Illustrated Bible" in the search window. It will also be available on other online sites.

(5) *Is there anything else you want to say about the Bible?*

Yes, two things—FIRST, to borrow from Nobel Brown, I highly recommend the Holy Land Illustrated Bible to you as an effective tool for enriching your personal Bible study. Trust me, you are going to love it. It's a great Bible. And SECOND (if you can keep a secret), Christmas shopping 2020? DONE!

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Biblical Illustrator (ISSN 0195-1351, Item 005075109) is published quarterly by LifeWay Christian Resources, One LifeWay Plaza, Nashville, TN 37234, Ben Mandrell, President. © 2020 LifeWay Christian Resources.

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Biblical Illustrator is designed to support the Bible study sessions in the student and adult Bible Studies for Life curriculum, Explore the Bible curriculum series, and The Gospel Project curriculum. Bible background articles and accompanying illustrative material are based on the passages studied in these curriculum series.

We believe that the Bible has God for its author; salvation for its end; and truth, without any mixture of error, for its matter and that all Scripture is totally true and trustworthy. To review LifeWay's doctrinal guideline, please visit lifeway.com/doctrinalguideline.

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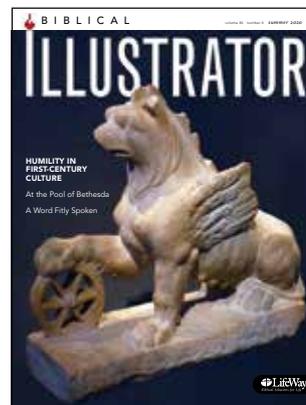
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About the Cover:
Statue from the Negev, dated AD 210-211, depicts the goddess Nemesis, who was the personification of divine punishment of those guilty of pride. She is portrayed as a horned, winged creature with a beak and the body of a lion beside the wheel of fate.

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h u m i l i t y

*in
first-century
culture*

By Ray Wilkins

FOR THOSE RAISED UNDER THE influence of the Judeo-Christian worldview, humility is an accepted virtue. The opposite of self-preoccupation, humility seeks to avoid the elevation of the self over others. To brag about oneself and one's accomplishments is generally considered to be rude or at least to be in poor taste. Since he reflects our cultural norm, we are not shocked by Peter's instructions: "Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another" (1 Pet. 5:5). Neither are we offended by his command to "humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God" (v. 6).¹

Some may be surprised to learn, however, that humility was not a universally accepted virtue in the first century. When Peter and the other apostles were giving ethical instruction to the churches, the dominant culture was Hellenism. With Alexander the Great's conquests, Greek culture, language, government, and religion spread from Greece eastward to the Indus Valley. With the rise of the Roman Empire, Hellenism and certain elements of Roman traditions merged together to form what is commonly known as Greco-Roman culture.

The Greek word most often translated "humility" is *tapeinos*. The basic meaning is to be lowly like a slave, or of no account.² How the Greeks viewed the word and the

social status it portrayed is made clear by the fact that they never used *tapeinos* in a positive way. The first known use of the term is by a Greek poet, Pindar; he used the term to mean "low."³ Plato spoke of humility as akin to groveling.⁴ He explained that humility is slavery and makes a person unfit to be a member of a healthy community. He also taught that to seek humility is to do great harm to the soul. On the other hand, Plato did not advocate a puffed-up sense of arrogance. Instead, in typical Greek fashion, he encouraged a middle way.

Aristotle, Plato's famous student, believed that both vanity and humility were vices to avoid. One should avoid vanity because the vain person claims too much respect and does not deserve it. Humility should be avoided because humble persons think they merit less than they actually deserve, a mindset that Aristotle disdained. If forced to choose between the two, Aristotle would choose vanity.⁵

Epictetus (AD 55-135), a first-century Stoic philosopher, wrote that to act in a lowly (humble) manner is to lack human dignity. Such persons have forgotten they are "citizens of one world" and "sons of one deity" who underlies their human dignity. Epictetus's statement is more significant because he was a contemporary of the New Testament writers.⁶ First-century Greco-Roman culture prized honor, which it defined as the affirmation of individual worth by one's peers and society. Children were taught to seek honor and avoid disgrace.⁷ A person received honor because of his or her ability to uphold the virtues of society. "Greco-Roman manuals on rhetoric attest to the importance of honor and to the way an orator would play on the audience's desire for honor in order to achieve persuasion."⁸ The society in which one lived determined what was considered honorable. Greco-Roman society and the smaller Jewish community held differing ideas

Right: From Lachish, Israel, and dated from 8th cent. BC, a basin for washing a person's foot. Once the basin was filled with water, a person would rest his or her foot on the raised platforms in the center. Jesus modeled humble servanthood to His disciples by washing their feet.



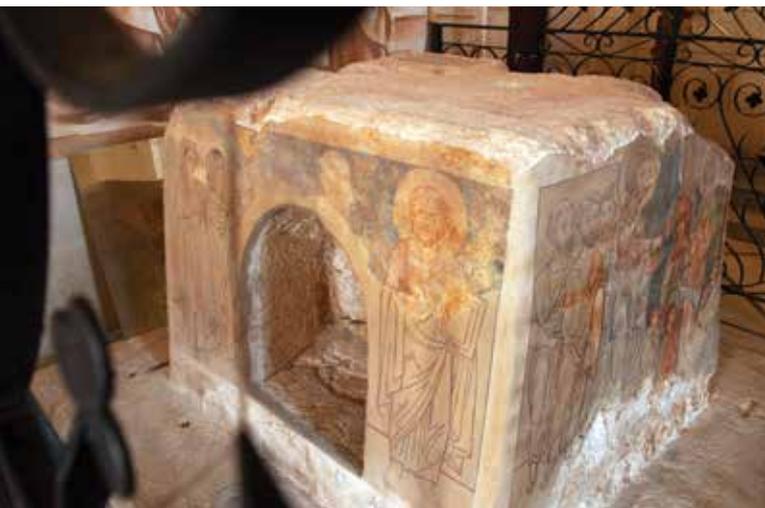
Right: Partial ruins of Tall el-Hammam (also called Abel Shittim), which is north of the Dead Sea in Jordan. Excavation work here has led some archaeologists to conclude this was the actual location of biblical Sodom. The entire

tell, which is the largest in Jordan, covers almost 90 acres. When praying for Sodom, Abraham asked, "Since I have ventured to speak to my lord—even though I am dust and ashes—suppose the fifty righteous lack five. Will you destroy the whole city for lack of five?" (Gen. 18:27-28, CSB).

ILLUSTRATOR PHOTO/DALE "GENO" ROBINSON (7/3/05)



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ILLUSTRATOR PHOTO/ KRISTEN HILLER (95/6343)

Above: Close-up of the large stone, which, according to tradition, Jesus stood on to get on the donkey and begin His triumphal entry into Jerusalem. The stone is located behind a wrought-iron fence, inside the Franciscan Church at Bethphage.



ILLUSTRATOR PHOTO/ BOB SCHATZ/ CARPTOLINE MUSEUM/ ROME (20/20/4)

Right: Victory scene of Marcus Aurelius (AD 161-180); those he's conquered are shown bowing to him. The Hebrew word for humility can refer to someone bowing down.

of virtue, but both taught their citizens to seek honor and avoid disgrace based on what values the society held as honorable. Greco-Roman society held humility in disdain, in large part because it represented self-abasement, which was the opposite of honor.

Valuing humility had long been a part of Israel's history. During the patriarchal period, although humility was not explicitly expressed in one's approach to God, it was implied in the physical posture of bowing low in worship.⁹ The gesture expressed surrender or submission to God. Abraham bowed before God at the oaks at Mamre (Gen. 18:2). When pleading with God to spare Sodom, he recognized that his status before God was as "dust and ashes" (v. 27). Moses learned humility during his exile from Egypt (Ex. 3:10-11). During Israel's sojourn in the wilderness, they learned humility (Deut. 8:2-5).

Whether God Himself or the trials and affliction of life humble a person, humility's proper work is to orient one toward God (Ps. 25:9). Solomon taught that God gives favor to the humble (Prov. 3:34). Centuries later, when Peter summoned believers to show humility, he echoed Solomon's words, "Toward the scorers he is scornful, but to the humble he gives favor" (1 Pet. 5:5).

During the Assyrian crisis, the eighth-century prophet Micah spoke to the Southern Kingdom of Judah. As the people cried out asking God what He desired, the prophet responded by stating the Lord had already showed them what was required, "to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God" (Mic. 6:8). The prophet reminded them that humility before God was always the expected virtue.

Jesus, the Son of God, frequently expressed humility in His relation to the Father. "He did not claim for himself arrogant regal powers."¹⁰ He entered Jerusalem on a donkey, a symbol of humility (Matt. 21:5-6). He encouraged His disciples to be humble as He Himself is humble (John 8:50). He taught them to serve one another rather than lording over one another as the Gentiles do (Matt. 20:25-28).

Writing to the Philippians, Paul encouraged the believers to exercise humility and pointed to Jesus as the ultimate example. Although He is God, Jesus was willing to take on the lowliness of human nature (Phil. 2:6-11). Such should be the attitude of every believer.

When Peter, therefore, called upon Christians to willingly express humility toward one another, he was drawing from a rich biblical tradition, which viewed humility in a positive light and thus as a virtue. For those reared in the Greco-Roman worldview, the teaching of Peter and the other apostles, however, would have most certainly been troublesome, perhaps even revolting. 🔥

1. All Scripture quotations are from the English Standard Version (ESV).

2. Walter Grundmann, "ταπεινός" (*tapeinos*, humility) in Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, trans. and ed. William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, 2nd ed., rev. F. Wilbur Gingrich and Frederick W. Danker (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1979), 804.

3. Pindar, *Nemean Odes*, 3, 82.

4. Plato, *Laws*, 5.728e.

5. Jonathan Barnes, *The Cambridge Companion to Aristotle* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1995).

6. Walter Grundmann, "ταπεινός" (*tapeinos*, humility) in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Friedrich, trans. and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 3.

7. David A. deSilva, "Honor and Shame," in *Dictionary of New Testament Background*, ed. Craig Evans & Stanley Porter (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000), 518.

8. *Ibid.*, 519.

9. T. Desmond Alexander, Brian Rosner, D. A. Carson, and Graeme Goldsworthy eds., "Humility, Pride," in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000), 567.

10. Patrick J. Hartin, "Humility," in *Dictionary of Scripture and Ethics*, gen. ed. Joel B. Green (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 390.

Ray Wilkins is the senior pastor of Lebanon Baptist Church in Frisco, Texas.



JESUS,
THE PHARISEES,
and the

SABBATH

BY DAVID E. LANIER

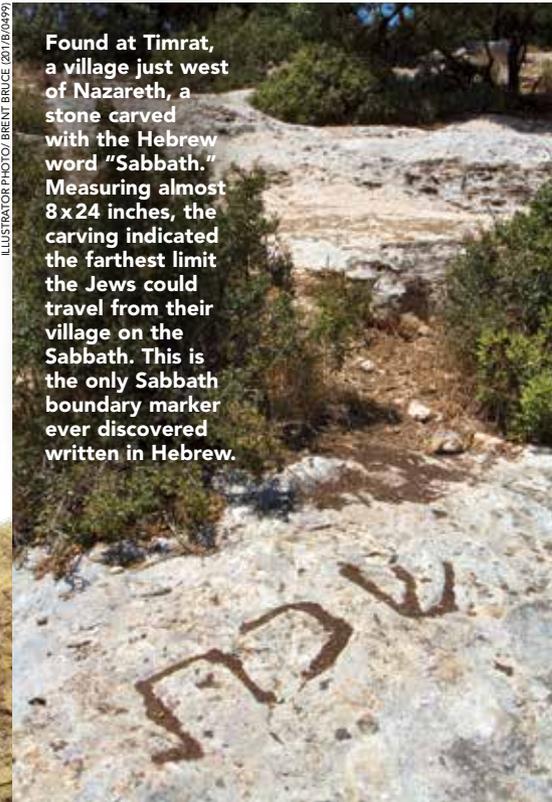
THE PHARISEES WERE respected laborers who not only studied Scripture but also attempted to apply it daily. They met in synagogues to rest and study Scripture on the Sabbath; the observance of rest had been passed down through Moses from God Himself.¹ Jesus and His disciples had a lot in common with the Pharisees; both groups considered all of Scripture authoritative, and not just the Pentateuch (as did the Sadducees). They believed in angels, demons, heaven, hell, and judgment to come. They were popular among the common people.² One is surprised that the conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees over the Sabbath led to their joining with Herodians to destroy Him (Mark 3:6).

The command to keep the Sabbath holy went back to creation itself: God rested on the seventh day, so His

people were to rest and do no work, along with servants, livestock, and resident aliens (Ex. 20:8-11; Deut. 5:12-15).³ God said, “Observe the Sabbath, for it is holy to you. Whoever profanes it must be put to death. If anyone does work on it, that person must be cut off from his people” (Ex. 31:14).⁴ Numbers 15:32-36 records the Israelites carrying out the death penalty; a man was stoned for gathering wood on the Sabbath.

Because God’s people had suffered exile due to idolatry, Jewish leaders resolved to keep the law carefully. In Jesus’ day the Pharisees and scribes taught its proper observance to the people. Where the Scripture was ambiguous, their tradition put a “hedge about the law” to avoid law-breaking. Both Jesus and the Pharisees would have agreed that Scripture

was authoritative and should be followed. They differed on how to apply it. The Pharisees began inductively by defining work. According to ancient Jewish law



ILLUSTRATOR PHOTO/ BRENT BRUCE (2011/04/99)

Found at Timrat, a village just west of Nazareth, a stone carved with the Hebrew word “Sabbath.” Measuring almost 8x24 inches, the carving indicated the farthest limit the Jews could travel from their village on the Sabbath. This is the only Sabbath boundary marker ever discovered written in Hebrew.



Scene from the Southwest Palace in Nineveh shows Assyrians soldiers carrying off goods and Judean captives from Lachish. Dated about 700-692 BC.

ILLUSTRATOR PHOTO/ BRITISH MUSEUM/ LONDON (31/9835)

known as the Mishnah, thirty-nine classes of work were forbidden on the Sabbath, including: “sowing, plowing, reaping, binding sheaves, threshing, winnowing...kneading, baking, shearing wool...weaving two threads, dividing two threads...writing two letters...striking with a hammer, [and] carrying out from one domain to another.”⁵

Jesus chose to begin deductively with the Sabbath commandment’s original intent: to promote the well-being of people and animals. Jesus healed a man on the Sabbath who had been paralyzed for thirty-eight years and told him to take up his mat and walk, which he did. When Jewish authorities criticized him for picking up his mat on the Sabbath, the man said Jesus had healed him and commanded him to do so (John 5:1-14). John explained,

Therefore, the Jews began persecuting Jesus because he was doing these things on the Sabbath. Jesus responded to them, “My Father is still working, and I am working also.” This is why the Jews began trying all the more to kill him: Not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal to God.

—John 5:16-18

In His ministry Jesus broke only the oral traditions the Pharisees and scribes had built around the Sabbath, not the Law itself. Jesus was returning to the original intent of the Law by restoring the man’s well-being, including his ability to make a living. God did the work!

A miracle recorded exclusively in John’s Gospel details Jesus’ healing a man born blind (John 9). According to the Pharisees, Jesus violated the Sabbath by spitting on the ground, making mud with the saliva, and spreading

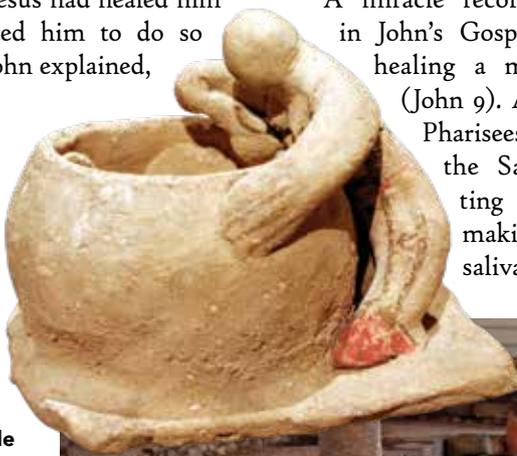
the mud on a blind man’s eyes (v. 6). Mixing mud with saliva resembled kneading, which was one of the specifically forbidden activities. The man gained his vision after going to wash in the pool of Siloam. The Pharisees began to question the man and his parents, but they were divided. The man had been born without sight; Jesus had done something unheard of among the prophets. He had created sight for a man who never had it—an act of creation!

Some of the Pharisees began with the act of kneading and concluded, “‘This man [Jesus] is not from God, because he doesn’t keep the Sabbath.’ But others were saying, ‘How can a sinful man perform such signs?’ And there was a division among them” (v. 16). The Pharisees interrogated the previously blind man until he summed up their dilemma for them:

“This is an amazing thing!... You don’t know where he is from, and yet he opened my eyes. We know that God doesn’t listen to sinners, but if anyone is God-fearing and

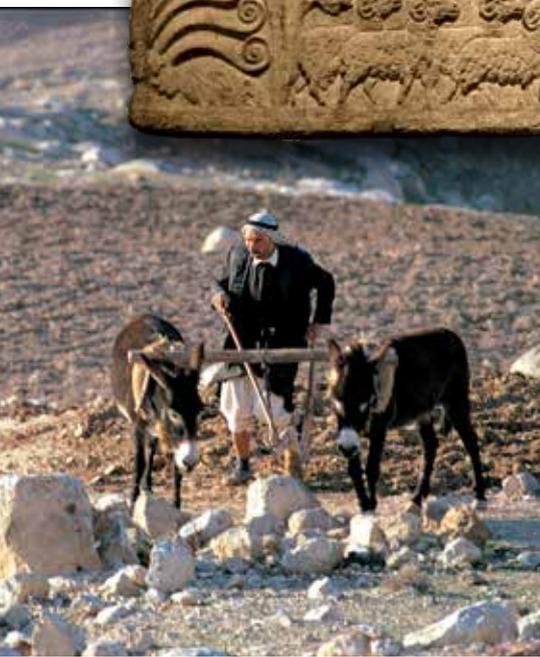
Right: Terra-cotta figurine from Cyprus; 6th cent. BC; depicts a woman leaning over a large ceramic oven. A fire burns in the bottom of the oven; the woman slaps flat bread against the inside wall of the oven. The Mishnah included a list of actions prohibited on the Sabbath, including kneading and baking bread.

Right: Synagogue at Magdala; worshipers would sit on benches that lined the walls. The stone block located on the floor between the two distant columns likely held the Torah scroll for the person reading the text.



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ILLUSTRATOR PHOTO / BRENT BRUCE (1659/1744)



Left: Arab farmer plowing his rocky field late in the day along the Jerusalem-Jericho road in Israel.

Above: From the

Byzantine era, a sarcophagus lid scene shows Jesus, the eschatological Judge, separating the sheep from the goats.

to realize who He was. “I came into this world for judgment, in order that those who do not see will see and those who do see will become blind” (v. 39). They asked Jesus, expecting a negative answer, “Some of the Pharisees who were with him heard these things and asked him, ‘We aren’t blind too, are we?’”

“‘If you were blind,’ Jesus told them, ‘you wouldn’t have sin. But now that you say, “We see,” your sin remains’” (vv. 40-41). Jesus has the authority to forgive, and to retain, their sins—they received a warning from the Judge Himself, the Lord of the Sabbath (Matt. 12:8; Luke 6:5).

Because of the oral traditions, the Sabbath had become yet another burden for those it was originally intended to relieve. Jesus confronted the Pharisees as the Son of Man, one “greater than the temple” (Matt. 12:6), the Lord of the Sabbath, and the eschatological Judge. He represented the age to come, the kingdom of God in their midst. He had returned to the original intent of the Sabbath—for it to be a day of relief and rest—by freeing those who had been held in bondage and giving them rest from affliction and the promise of blessed, more-productive lives. Those whom He healed from dropsy, a withered hand, crippling back trouble, blindness, and

paralysis could now enter the Temple and worship God. Isaiah 65–66 foresaw God’s final dealing with the problem of sin, the blessedness of rejoicing again in His presence, and the sharing of God’s rest by His provision of righteousness and forgiveness quite apart from works.⁶

Jesus represented the messianic age to come, where the blind saw, the deaf heard, the lame walked, and the blessedness of God and forgiveness from sin rested upon those who accepted the grace He offered. Paul summed it up nicely when he told the Colossians, “Therefore, don’t let anyone judge you in regard to food and drink or in the matter of a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day. These are a shadow of what was to come; the substance is Christ” (Col. 2:16-17). ❖

1. F. Scott Spencer, “A Withered Hand, Hardened Hearts, and a Distressed Jesus: Getting a Feel for the Sabbath Scene in Mark 3:1-6,” *Review and Expositor* 114.2 (2017): 295. The synagogue developed during the intertestamental period, but the Sabbath observance dated from Moses himself.

2. W. Derek Suderman, “‘Is It Lawful?’ Interpretation and Discernment in Light of the Sabbath Controversies,” *Vision* 16.1 (Spring 2015): 84-85; Clayton Harrop and Charles W. Draper, “Jewish Parties in the New Testament,” in *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, gen. ed. Chad Brand, rev. ed. (Nashville: Holman Reference, 2015), 896-97.

3. Michael Rogness, “The Sabbath: Holy Time,” *Word and World* 36.3 (Summer 2016): 286.

4. All Scripture quotations are from the Christian Standard Bible (CSB).

5. Shabat 7.1-2, Mishna, October 23, 2019, www.sefaria.org/Mishnah_Shabbat.7.2?lang=bi

6. Daniel C. Timmer, *Creation, Tabernacle, and Sabbath: The Sabbath Frame of Exodus 31:12-17; 35:1-3* (Göttingen, Germany: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2009), 150-51.

David E. Lanier is professor of New Testament, retired, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, Wake Forest, North Carolina.

does his will, he listens to him. Throughout history no one has ever heard of someone opening the eyes of a person born blind. If this man were not from God, he wouldn't be able to do anything.”

—vv. 30-33

Unable to deal with the implications of Jesus being God, the Pharisees return to their old system. “‘You were born entirely in sin,’ they replied, ‘and are you trying to teach us?’ Then they threw him out” (v. 34). By casting the previously blind man out of the synagogue, they were in effect relegating him to an eternity of separation from God (as was the case with the Samaritans). The eschatological Judge, however, was present, and everything had changed. He found the man and gave him the opportunity to believe in the Son of Man, restoring him to true fellowship with God (vv. 35-38).

Jesus then challenged those Pharisees who accompanied Him

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Marriage

IN THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST



By JANICE MEIER



MARRIAGE CUSTOMS and traditions vary significantly from culture to culture and sometimes from generation to generation within the same culture. The American bride has something old, new, borrowed, and blue on her wedding day and tosses her bouquet at the ceremony's conclusion. In contrast, a marriage tradition in the Congo forbids couples to smile on their wedding day. According to a Chinese custom, the groom shoots his bride with several headless arrows prior to their wedding. He then breaks the arrows during the ceremony in hopes of ensuring the couple's love will last

forever. Cuban practices dictate that every man who dances with the bride must pin money to her dress to help pay for the wedding and honeymoon. And in the Philippines newly married couples release a pair of white doves to portray their anticipation of a harmonious life together. These examples represent just a few of many fascinating marriage customs around the globe.¹

But how was marriage practiced in the ancient Near East? What customs and elements were involved? This article focuses on marriage practices among God's people in the Old Testament era. It also briefly explores marriage customs in other parts of that ancient world as they both resembled and differed from practices in ancient Israel.

Attempting to recapture marital practices among the ancient Israelites entails dealing with a span of over two millennia. Marriage customs among God's people not only differed throughout this time but also varied among families of different socioeconomic levels within any given period. Nevertheless, we can draw some clear conclusions about God's design for marriage and how His people's practices sometimes followed and sometimes deviated from that design.

We also can observe ways Israelite marriage both compared with and contrasted to those of other ancient Near Eastern cultures.

How commonly did polygamy exist among God's people in the Old Testament world? While Genesis 2:20-25 makes clear God's design for marriage is monogamy—one man and one woman, the Old Testament also accurately records many polygamous examples, including Lamech (Gen. 4:23), Jacob (29:13-30), Esau (26:34; 28:9; 36:1-5), Gideon (Judg. 8:30), Elkanah (1 Sam. 1:1-2), David (25:39-44; 2 Sam. 3:2-5), and Solomon (a vast harem, 1 Kings 3:1; 11:1-3). God's Word also clearly presents the tensions among wives and children in such households, thereby demonstrating that God had human beings' best interests at heart when He designed monogamous marriage.

Apparently the most common

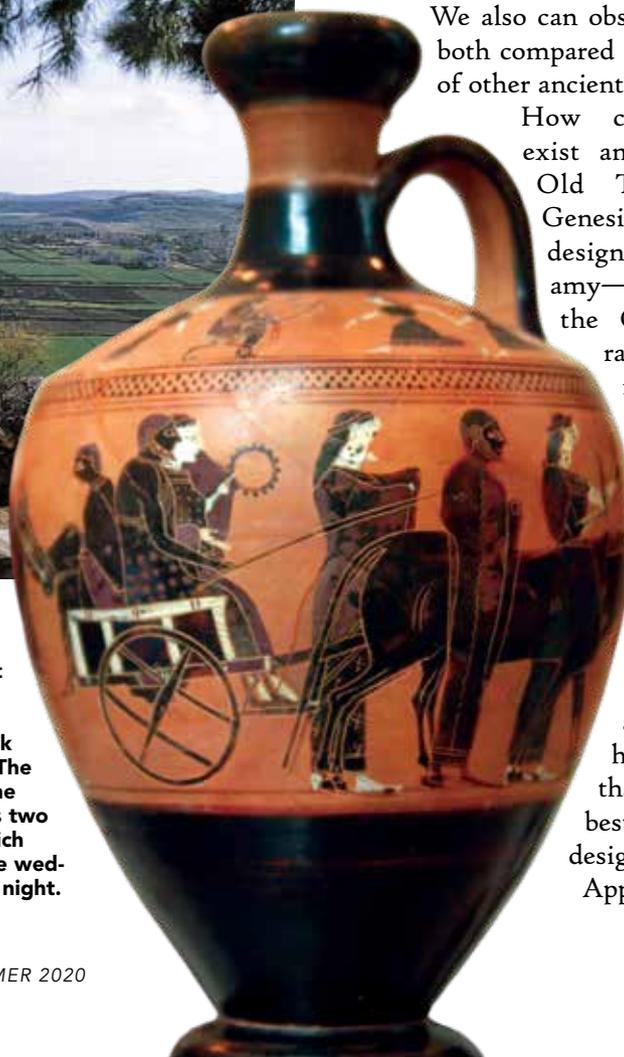
ILLUSTRATOR PHOTO/ JERRY VARDAMAN COLLECTION (29/5/4)



Above: Field of Boaz, located outside of Bethlehem, where Ruth gleaned grain after the harvesters had worked the field.

Right: Oil flask decorated with a wedding scene.

The marital couple and best man sit in the cart; guests follow and walk along side. The woman in the front carries two torches, which indicates the wedding was at night.



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Using a building style that dates back to the patriarchs, beehive houses are still in use at Haran. Abraham sent his servant to find a suitable

wife for Isaac. The servant went to Aram-naharaim, a region in northwest Mesopotamia that includes Haran. There he found Rebekah.

ILLUSTRATOR PHOTO/ BOB SCHATZ (25/8/11)

form of marriage in Israel was monogamy. In comparison, the Mesopotamians and Babylonians basically practiced monogamy; the Assyrians engaged in polygamy.

Israelite marriages occurred between a man and woman who typically belonged to the same clan, a group smaller than the tribe but larger than the family. Israelite social structure within the family has been identified as patriarchal, signifying the father governed the household and exercised authority over other family members. Nevertheless the biblical ideal of patriarchy degenerated into a corrupt, abusive, irresponsible use of power when the Israelites adopted Canaanite modes of living. Thus the designation *patricentric* perhaps better expresses God's plan for family relationships. This term means the male head of the family functioned as its center. In healthy Old Testament households the male leader did not act as a dictator or tyrant. Because family members were viewed as extensions of the head's life, his own interests depended on his family's well-being. An emphasis on the responsibilities associated with household leadership, instead of on its privileges and power, fits well with a basic Old Testament theme of leadership as a privilege given to an individual for service (Deut. 17:14-20; Prov. 31:2-9).² An overarching purpose



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Left: Egyptian alabaster perfume bottle; dated to the 5th cent. BC. The husband's ritual included anointing his bride with scented oil.

Above: From time of Cambyses II, who ruled the Achaemenid Empire 530-522 BC, Babylonian tablet gives details of a dowry payment.

of marriage was to build a family and continue the family line (Ruth 4:11).

The Israelites viewed marriage as a covenant or contract relationship (Prov. 2:16-17; Mal. 2:14) as did other peoples of the ancient Near East. Around 2000 BC, the Mesopotamian Law of Eshnunna stated that if a man married another man's daughter without asking her parents' permission and without concluding a formal marriage contract with them, the woman was not his "housewife."³

Parents played a major role in determining appropriate spouses for their children. Abraham sent a dependable servant back to his homeland to find a wife for Isaac (Gen. 24:1-61). Isaac and Rebekah sent Jacob to Paddan-aram to get a wife from relatives

there (28:1-5). Saul promised his daughter Michal to David in exchange for his killing 100 Philistines (1 Sam. 18:20-27). From the beginning of Israel's existence, the Lord commanded His people not to intermarry with Canaan's inhabitants for religious reasons (Deut. 7:1-5; Josh. 23:12-13; Mal. 2:11).

Typically when Israelite children approached what their parents considered marriageable age (approximately thirteen for a girl and fifteen for a boy), the groom's father contacted the parents of the potential bride to negotiate the terms of the marriage covenant. Specifically the young couple's parents negotiated what is sometimes designated the bride or purchase price. The Hebrew term might also be rendered the "wedding money." It consisted of a sum of money or goods that the groom paid to the bride's father to compensate the family for the loss of their daughter.⁴ Others prefer to view the Hebrew term as payment given the bride's parents to promote the marriage's stability and to strengthen the ties between the bride's and groom's families.⁵ "Babylonian law required the bride's parents to make [or give] their daughter a wedding gift or settlement which remained her property."⁶

After the parents of the bride and groom agreed on the terms of the marriage contract, the young couple

entered a period of betrothal prior to their actual wedding. Betrothal involved such a binding commitment that a woman who willingly had sexual relations with another man during this time committed adultery (Deut. 22:23-27). While their commitment to one another was binding, the couple neither lived together nor physically consummated the union during this period, which typically lasted at least a year. The betrothal period allowed the groom time to build a house for the couple to live in after they wed; additionally it gave the bride time to strengthen her familial skills and her family time to put together her dowry.⁷

Although the Old Testament offers little information about the nature of Israelite weddings, Bible scholars have inferred the following elements from passages like Ezekiel 16:8-13. Some of these elements were private while others were public. (i) The husband covered his bride with his garment (Deut. 22:30;

Below: Dr. Harold Mosley digging at Gezer, Israel. To the right and waist high is a dark horizontal line just below the Solmonic casemate con-

struction, thought to be the burn layer described in 1 Kings 9:16: "Pharaoh king of Egypt had attacked and captured Gezer. He then

burned it, killed the Canaanites who lived in the city, and gave it as a dowry to his daughter, Solomon's wife" (CSB).

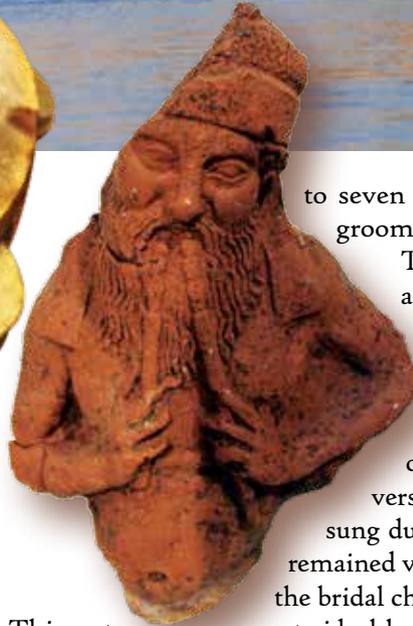
ILLUSTRATOR PHOTO/ GB HOWELL (35/66/45)



The Elephantine Papyri describe parts of domestic life for a group of Jews who lived on the Elephantine Island (shown right) during the time Egypt was under Persian control.



ILLUSTRATOR PHOTO/ BOB SCHATZ (17/11/7)



Above: Tambourine excavated at the Athens agora.

Right: From Medma, Italy, a terra-cotta figurine

of a man playing a double flute; dated 420 BC. Marriage celebrations typically included festive music.

to seven days, and the bride wore a veil that the groom removed.

The Song of Songs calls attention to aspects associated with marriage festivities. As in most cultures, weddings provided opportunities for great celebration (Sg. of Sg. 3:11). Attendants accompanied the bride and sang love songs as the bridal party proceeded to the groom's house. Some of the verses in the Song of Songs are likely lyrics sung during Jewish wedding festivities. The bride remained veiled until she and the groom were alone in the bridal chamber (4:1,3; 6:7). The Song of Songs presents ideal love between husband and wife in the bridal chamber. We see no hint of "assertive masculinity and passive femininity." Rather, we see a couple reaching out to each other in mutual delight (2:16; 6:3).¹²

Ruth 3:9; Ezek. 16:8; Mal. 2:16). This act symbolized the establishment of a new relationship and the husband's commitment to provide for his wife. (2) Invoking the Lord as a witness, the groom swore an oath of faithfulness to his bride. (3) The husband formally declared his entrance into a covenant with his wife. (4) The husband bathed his wife and then anointed her with oil to express his love and devotion (Ezek. 16:9). This action compares with an old Babylonian practice of bathing as part of the marriage ritual.⁸ (5) The groom then dressed his bride in the finest garments and jewelry he could afford (vv. 10-13). (6) Finally, the husband prepared a fine meal for his bride and they dined together in his house. At some point in the marriage ceremony, written copies of the covenant or contract evidently were deposited in a safe place.⁹ Scholars base this conclusion on written marriage contracts found at the fifth-century BC Jewish colony at Elephantine, Egypt.¹⁰ The Babylonian Code of Hammurabi also confirms this practice among other cultures.¹¹ Little else is known about wedding ceremonies in ancient Mesopotamia. We do know they typically lasted five

1. Nancy Mattia and Andrea Park, "47 Fascinating Wedding Traditions From Around the World," Brides.com, February 18, 2019, www.brides.com/gallery/wedding-traditions-around-the-world.
 2. See Daniel I. Block, "Marriage and Family in Ancient Israel," in *Marriage and Family in the Biblical World*, ed. Ken M. Campbell (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2003), 40-44. Block identifies Israelite family structure as "patricentric" rather than "patriarchal."
 3. Albrecht Goetze, trans., "The Laws of Eshnunna," in *The Ancient Near East: An Anthology of Texts and Pictures* [ANE], ed. James B. Pritchard, vol. 1 (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1958), 135.
 4. Walter C. Kaiser, "מֹהָר" (*mohar*, wedding money), in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, ed. R. Laird Harris (Chicago: Moody, 1980), 1:492.
 5. Block, "Marriage and Family in Ancient Israel," 57.
 6. Peter Trutza, "Marriage," in *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, gen. ed. Merrill C. Tenney (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976), 4:96.
 7. Block, "Marriage and Family in Ancient Israel," 58.
 8. *Ibid.*, 45, n. 49.
 9. *Ibid.*, 44-45.
 10. *Ibid.*, 45; H.L. Ginsberg, trans., "Aramaic Papyri from Elephantine," in ANE, 170-172.
 11. Theophile J. Meek, trans., *The Code of Hammurabi*, section 128, in ANE, 152.
 12. Block, "Marriage and Family in Ancient Israel," 67, n. 12.

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TAMBOURINE: ILLUSTRATOR PHOTO/ TOM HOOKE/ ATHENS AGORA MUSEUM (66/14/15)