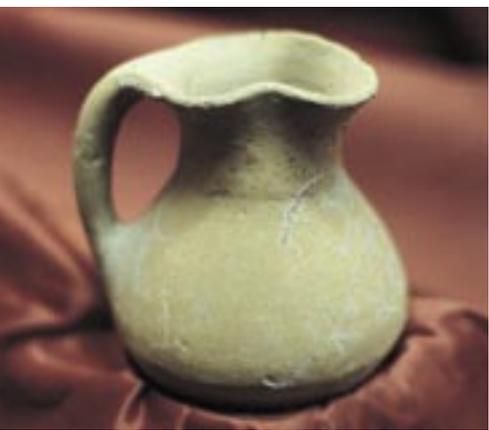


TO PRACTICE

Hospitality



ILLUSTRATOR PHOTO/BOB SCHATZ/ALACA HUYUK MUSEUM (25/27/10)
Left: Pottery urn, 2000-1200 B.C. from Alaca Huyuk, the Anatolian site northeast of the ancient Hittite capital of Hattusa.

Right: Pots from Iron Age (1450-550 B.C.), found in northwest Iran at Hasanlu.

Far right: Large fruit bowl from Jericho, dates from 1800-1500 B.C.



ILLUSTRATOR PHOTO/ BOB SCHATZ/ ROYAL ONTARIO MUSEUM, TORONTO (29/15/4)



Small caravansary near Lake Van at the junction of two caravan routes, one leading north, the second leading west.

ILLUSTRATOR PHOTO BOB SCHAZZ (25/16/11)

BY DAVID L. JENKINS

REASONS FOR EXTENDING HOSPITALITY have varied through the centuries. From the beginning, however, the motivation for showing hospitality seems to have been rooted in the nomadic lifestyle of ancient peoples. The desert life associated with people in Near and Middle Eastern lands fostered not only a sense of loneliness, but also a constant awareness of the need for physical protection and sustenance.

Eastern Hospitality’s Deep Roots

Hospitality in the ancient Near East grew from necessity. Rather than a mere courtesy extended to travelers, it was a means villagers used to discover whether strangers were friends or enemies. Strangers were always a potential threat to a community’s security. Extending hospitality by providing food, water, and shelter was a way to temporarily adopt strangers into the community. The areas between these zones of hospitality posed threats to travelers by placing them at the mercy of bandits, wild animals, and the elements. Yet when travelers entered a zone of hospitality, those living there were obligated to feed, shelter, and protect them. David may have had this kind of safety and protection in mind when he wrote, “You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies” (Ps. 23:5).¹ Thus such expressions of hospitality were not always merely benevolent. They were a means of assuring the safety of the community itself.

Both hosts and strangers followed a particular code of behavior. The hosts were the fathers of households in their own villages. They would extend the invitation and then repeat it. If the stranger accepted it, the host would wash the stranger’s feet to indicate that he was a guest. Then came food, shelter, and protection. Furthermore, the host was not to interrogate the guest.

The stranger, on the other hand, also had a certain protocol to follow. He initially was to refuse his host’s first invitation—then he could accept the second gesture of welcome. He would agree to remain for only a specified length of time, which the host could later extend at his discretion. He was never to ask for, and certainly never to covet, the host’s possessions. Upon departing, the guest was to bless the members of the household for their hospitality.²

Ancient Jewish Hospitality

Hospitality for the ancient Jews went beyond necessity or even a mere expression of good manners. To show hospitality was considered a sacred obligation, or a *mitzvah* (a commandment). To the Jews, a *mitzvah* was more than a mere commandment, however. It contained an element of joy that one received from serving others as well as serving God.³ The *mitzvah* involving hospitality is called *hachnasat orchim*, a Hebrew phrase meaning “the bringing in of guests.” To

ILLUSTRATOR PHOTO DAVID ROGERS; JOSEPH A. CALLAWAY ARCHAEOLOGICAL MUSEUM, THE SOUTHERN BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY, LOUISVILLE, KY (13/9/06)



LESSON REFERENCE

ETB: Romans 12:9-21



Left: Interior of a Bedouin tent outside Jerusalem on the road to Jericho.

Below: Roman era chesse press.

Below right: Bedouin family with 15 children. The frame in front of the house holds a goatskin filled with whole milk. Family members take turns shaking the skin to separate the milk from the cheese.

ILLUSTRATION PHOTO, JAMES MCLEMORE (138/94)

the Jews the supreme model of hospitality is Abraham, the nomadic desert dweller and patriarch. Ancient tradition held that Abraham took care to open all four sides of his tent so strangers would know they were welcome.

Charitable associations existed in the Middle Ages that provided shelter for Jewish travelers who often were in danger in a non-Jewish world. Also, people considered providing food and shelter for scholars studying at a *yeshiva* (a Jewish religious school) to be an honor.⁴

Such courteous expressions of hospitality grew out of the difficult existence of those who lived in desert lands where having water and food often meant the difference between life and death. Even enemies were not to be allowed to die of hunger or thirst. People considered it a sin to eat alone when “the fatherless” were hungry (Job 31:17). Not only were people to share their food with the hungry, but also were to “bring the poor and homeless” into their homes (Isa. 58:7). The Ammonites and Moabites were cursed because they did not provide food and water for the Hebrew people during their desert journey from Egypt to the promised land (Deut. 23:4).

First-Century Hospitality Traditions

During the first century A.D., inns were established to meet the needs of travelers along major routes. These inns, however, not only offered poor service, but they were known for allowing the practice of immoral and questionable activities. Thus, in view of such deplorable conditions in these inns, Christian travelers sought the hospitality of fellow believers. Most of the churches Paul established were on the main trade routes of the Roman Empire. Paul’s instructions to his traveling coworkers often revealed his concern that they be received hospitably by Christians along the way. Occasionally the Christian practice of hospitality was abused. One way to circumvent persons from abusing gestures of hospitality was to provide letters of recommendation to introduce traveling Christians to churches along the way.⁵ In the conclusion of his Letter to the Romans, Paul included such a recommendation for Phoebe (Rom. 16:1-2).

After exhorting Roman believers to “pursue hospitality”

(12:13), Paul wrote, quoting Proverbs 25:21, “If your enemy is hungry, feed him. If he is thirsty, give him something to drink” (Rom. 12:20). He was simply repeating what had always been done among nomadic people. Those who refused to extend hospitality in New Testament times were liable to rejection. As Jesus was sending His disciples out to minister in His name, He told them “if anyone will not welcome you . . . shake the dust off your feet when you leave that house or town” (Matt. 10:14).

The Jews also believed that angels in disguise were sent to determine whether people were obeying the law of hospitality. People were certain the angels were sent to Abraham for this purpose (Gen. 18:2-8), and also to Gideon (Judg. 6:11-22). This was also a concern in New Testament times (Heb. 13:2).

Jesus demonstrated His own hospitality in feeding the multitudes (Mark 6:30-44; 8:1-10) and in serving His disciples at the Passover meal (Luke 22:14-23). Jesus washed the disciples’ feet as a tender expression of hospitality (John 13:3-5). This was another important gesture of hospitality toward guests who entered a home. Also, if strangers were invited to spend the night, normally they would not sleep alone. Other members of the family would sleep with or near them, since it was considered a breach of courtesy to leave a guest alone during the night. Should the house be a simple, one-room dwelling with only one place to sleep, the guest then would sleep with the family or on the roof of the house if the weather permitted (1 Sam. 9:26).⁶

Christians are urged, therefore, to show hospitality (Heb. 13:2; 1 Pet. 4:9). The Greek word for hospitality, *philoxenia*, means a “love for others.” Those who preached the gospel were in particular need of hospitality, since they had no other means of support (3 John 5-8). Their hosts generally extended hospitality for several days, and then the preachers moved on to another place (see Acts 9:43; 16:15; Rom. 16:2). Further, Paul insisted that showing hospitality was essential for the church leader (1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:8).

True hospitality is not based on merely returning the favor to one who has extended hospitality to



BEDOUIN HOSPITALITY

Arab tribesmen called Bedouins have crisscrossed the Middle Eastern desert lands for centuries with their flocks of sheep and goats. These desert dwellers are constantly in search of water and pasture for their flocks. They live, as Abraham did, in tents made of woven goat's hair. This coarse material, probably the "sackcloth" of the Bible, protects them and their families from the sun, sand, and wind. Curtains divide their tents into compartments for family members and guests.¹

The Bedouin shepherds, long noted for their hospitality, today serve visitors to their tents freshly brewed coffee and sweetened mint tea. Foreigners are taught, painstakingly, how to hold the tiny glass containers of tea without burning their fingers. Then the guests may be invited to share the food

the Bedouins eat, which includes lamb, rice, and herbs heaped on a large tray. Silverware amounts to large pieces of flat bread used to scoop up the food, which is then folded sandwich-style.² After the meal, the guests are invited to recline on cushions for conversation and occasionally musical entertainment. To this day, to refuse Bedouin hospitality is considered a grave insult.³ **B**

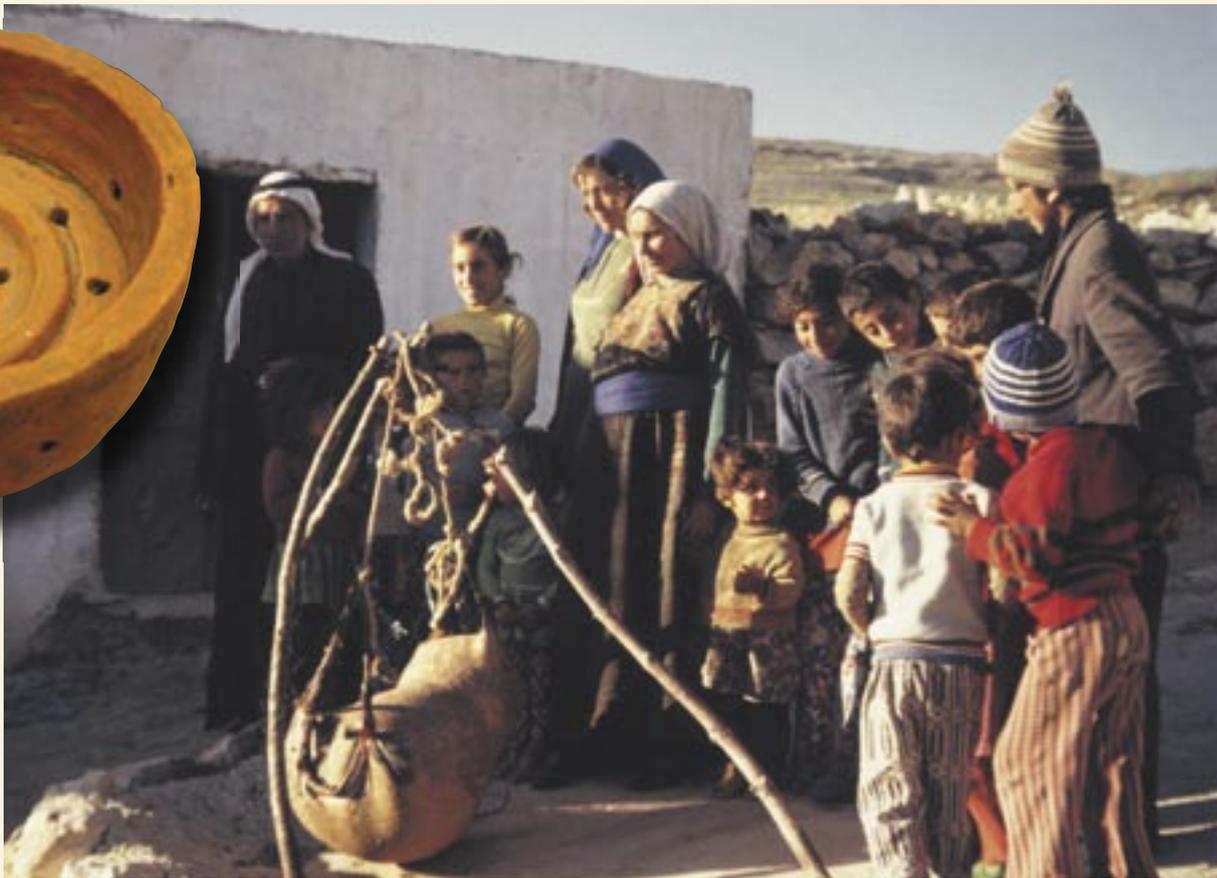
1. *Everyday Life in Bible Times*, Melville Bell Grosvenor and Frederick G. Vosburgh, eds. (National Geographic Society, 1967), 97.

2. The popular Middle-Eastern "fast food," *falafel*, is a modern reminder of this manner of eating. Falafel is a Middle-Eastern snack shaped into fried balls of chick peas, onion, bread, and spices—eaten by hand.

3. Information in this paragraph is based on writer's experience of traveling and eating with Bedouins through the years.

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ILLUSTRATOR PHOTO: BRITISH MUSEUM (81/25/88)



ILLUSTRATOR PHOTO: LOUISE KOHL SMITH

you. To be truly hospitable is to follow the model in Jesus' parable of the great banquet (Luke 14:15-24), in which the man giving the banquet extended his invitation to "the poor, maimed, blind, and lame!" (v. 21). True Christian hospitality includes welcoming not only friends and acquaintances, but strangers, the poor, and even those living on the periphery of society who cannot extend hospitality themselves. **B**

1. All Scripture quotations in this article are taken from the Holman Christian Standard Bible.

2. Victor H. Matthews, Don C. Benjamin, *Social World of Ancient Israel 1250-587 BCE* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1993), 82-83.

3. *Gates of Mitzvah, A Guide to the Jewish Life Cycle*, Simeon J. Maslin, ed. (New York: Central Conference of American Rabbis, 1979), 3.

4. Anita Diamant, Howard Cooper, *Living a Jewish Life: A Guide for Starting, Learning, Celebrating, and Parenting* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1991), 25-26.

5. Abraham J. Malherbe, *Social Aspects of Early Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 94-96.

6. Ralph Gower, *The New Manners and Customs of Bible Times* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1987), 243-244.

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