

[Dictionary of Daily Life
in Biblical and Post-Biblical Antiquity](#)

Introduction

The *Dictionary of Daily Life in Biblical and Post-Biblical Antiquity (DDL)*, of which this is the fourth and final volume, was a project begun 30 years ago with the collaboration of the distinguished Old Testament scholar Roland K. Harrison (1920-1993), to whom Marvin Wilson and I dedicate this reference work. In the original conception of the project, Harrison, Wilson, and I were to write all the articles for a work entitled *Dictionary of Bible Manners and Customs*. It subsequently became expedient to engage the research and writing skills of other select scholars of the ancient world.

While there are many excellent Bible dictionaries and encyclopedias, and popular books on biblical backgrounds available, I had noticed a serious deficiency. I noted that while every one of these had an entry on “Abomination,” none (with the exception of the six-volume *Anchor Bible Dictionary*) had an entry on “Abortion.” Why was this the case? It was because these references were keyed to the words which occurred in the Bible.

From my 40 years of teaching the history of ancient Mesopotamia, Egypt, Greece, Rome, early Judaism, and early Christianity, I was well aware of the widespread practice of abortion, contraception, and infanticide in these societies and epochs. I therefore proposed a new framework for the *DDL*, one based on the Human Relations Area Files, an anthropological grid of human society, which would systematically and comparatively survey different aspects of culture, whether they were highlighted in the Bible or not.

The biblical texts were not intended to give us a complete representation of their worlds. In fact, they take for granted what was well known to both the writers and readers, but of which we are not aware. It is as though we hear the vocalization of an operatic libretto, but do not see the scenery and the costumes of the singers. Thanks, however, to extra-biblical texts and archaeology, we are able to recreate much of the background for the Bible.

For example, what did ancient people eat and drink? In the essay on FOOD PRODUCTION, one will learn that before the introduction of rotary mills, housewives had to labor on hands and knees about four hours a day to grind wheat and barley for their daily bread. Most of the bread in the ancient world was flat (unleavened) bread, because the predominant emmer wheat and the barley in Mesopotamia, Egypt, and Greece did not have the gluten necessary to cause bread to rise.

From the articles on CLOTHING, DYEING, LAUNDRY & FULLERS, and TEXTILES, one would learn that white linen was the preferred textile in Egypt, and was worn by Israelite priests and New Testament angels. How was Jesus dressed? Jesus's sole garments, except for his burial shroud, were woolen. As wool was not easily laundered, his clothes would have been dirty except for the moment of his transfiguration.

How did Jesus appear? From the article on BARBERS & BEARDS, we can conclude with near certainty that Jesus had a beard. Why? Men in antiquity could not shave themselves. They had to resort either to slaves or to barbers for a shave. Moreover, beards were a symbol of masculinity and seniority. The Old Testament word for "elders" is literally "bearded ones."

Where did people live? This would have varied from place to place and from one time period to another. From the article on DWELLINGS, one would learn that in the Old Testament era in Palestine most would have lived in houses with flat roofs and courtyards full of animals. In Rome, 95% of the people would have lived in *insulae*, crowded tenements without kitchens or bathrooms.

What about the relations between men and women? From the articles on EDUCATION and MARRIAGE, one would learn a striking fact, which is missing from both the Old and the New Testaments—the average age of spouses. We learn from our extra-biblical evidence that the bride would have certainly been a young teenager, and the groom several years her senior. The early marriage of girls, to preserve their purity, meant that they had only at best a primary education, with the exception of those from wealthy Roman families, which could afford private tutors for their daughters.

The *DDL* is also quite unique in attempting to trace the developments of the features of the biblical world along what the French historians of the Annales School have called the *longue durée*, that is, over the centuries *after* the New Testament era. It is instructive to understand how the Jewish rabbis, in following the traditions of the Pharisees, debated over the application of biblical laws in changing circumstances, and how the Church Fathers also responded to these same developments.

Rather than attempting to cover all possible topics, we have chosen to concentrate on 120 subjects, not because of their prominence in the biblical text but because of their significant roles in the ancient world. For example, ASTROLOGY, DREAMS, MAGIC, and DIVINATION & SORTITION (i.e., the casting of lots) are mentioned sparingly in the biblical texts

themselves but they were dominant facets of life in antiquity.

The outline each contributor has followed is to briefly summarize references to his or her subject in: (1) the Old Testament and (2) the New Testament; followed by (3) the Near Eastern world, primarily Mesopotamia and Egypt, with some references to Anatolia and Persia; (4) the Greco-Roman world, from the Minoans and Mycenaeans, Homer, through the Hellenistic era, the Roman Republic, and the Roman Empire; (5) the Jewish world, including the Old Testament Apocrypha, Pseudepigrapha, Philo, Josephus, the Dead Sea Scrolls, the Mishnah, and the Talmuds (Babylonian and Jerusalem); and (6) the Christian world, including the church fathers up to Chrysostom and Augustine, as well as the early Byzantine empire to Justinian. Each article closes with a bibliography providing both source material for the article and material for further study. Further, the articles are carefully cross-referenced with other articles in print or planned.

The citations from the Old Testament and the New Testament ...

[See text for further citations info.]

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