

LIFE OUTSIDE THE HOME Travel

In our day, travel is something that we very nearly take for granted. If we want to go somewhere, we go out to the car, start it up, and drive away. Travel in the 21st century is relatively safe and commonplace. In Bible days, however, it was not so easy to journey from one place to another. A person only left his village or city if he had a good reason to do so. Travel in first century Palestine was difficult and dangerous. One did not just "go visiting" on a whim.

The Dangers of Travel

The Apostle Paul spoke of the dangers of travel in 2 Cor 11:26-27, "I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers. ²⁷ I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked." The danger is also obvious in reading how one writer described the things that need to be done prior to a journey: "[A traveler must] pay all debts, provide for dependants, give parting gifts, return all articles under trust . . . bid farewell to all . . ." (*Wight*, 270)

Much peril awaited the traveler, especially the one who journeyed alone. Travelers were a frequent target for bandits (cf. *Parable of the Good Samaritan*). Consequently, it was common to go in large groups. A guide who knew the locations of water and resting places often accompanied the travelers. Occasionally groups would travel at night for safety.

Sometimes, the preferred mode of transportation was walking, but on any trips of any distance, horses, mules, donkeys, or camels would be used.



Travel by Land

The Distance

In Bible times, distances were usually measured by the number of days it took for travel (See Gen 30:36). A "day's journey" would usually be a distance of 20-30 miles. A "Sabbath Day's journey" among the Jews would be about two miles.

Food on the Way

A traveler would take their own food with them, generally enough for one or two days. There were no restaurants along the way, but sometimes an innkeeper would provide a fire that guests could use to cook their food if that were necessary. Bread, grain, and dried fruits were commonly carried by travelers.

Where to Stay

If the journey lasted overnight, arrangements had to be made for shelter and sleeping. If simple resting places were available, they could be used (tent or cave).

Villages (especially in the New Testament) would frequently have accommodations for travelers. They would not be fancy "inns" like we are used to seeing in our present-day cities, but would be more like a campground. Guests would usually have to provide their own food and any other amenities.

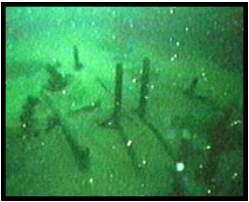
Larger towns might have a "caravansary." This was a large building with a courtyard and rooms built into it. Animals would stay in the courtyard while the people occupied the rooms surrounding it. If the caravansary is large enough to have an "innkeeper," he might also sell certain things desirable to the traveler (coffee, food). There may even be a market connected to the inn so travelers can purchase fresh meat.



Wight

Travel by Sea

Travel by sea was dangerous and frightening to many people in Bible lands. Windstorms on the Mediterranean could be violent and during winter months, ships usually did not venture out at all. The typical person did not go anywhere by ship unless he absolutely had to do so. No charts, no modern navigational aids, and no motorized boats added up to a bit of a fearsome proposition.



Ships that did venture out into the Mediterranean were careful to stay within sight of land at all times. Instead of taking the fastest routes, the ships would follow the coastlines for safety. If a storm came up, they could generally run in toward shore and find shelter.

Passengers

Shipping was primarily used for moving freight. There were no “passenger” ships, so to speak. If you wanted passage, you would buy some available room on a freighter. There were no staterooms or modern conveniences aboard these boats.

Ships

Warships were mainly driven by oars while merchant ships used sails. Even the sailing boats, however, were always equipped with oars for emergencies or when extra navigation was necessary. A Lieutenant Smith (1919) wrote: “In general outline, they did not differ so much from sailing ships of fifty years ago, especially in their under-water parts, with the exception that the bow and stern were very much alike . . . the ancient ships were not steered as those in modern times, by a

Scripture Study

Read Psalm 107:25-30 for a description of the LORD who can calm storms at sea.

Scripture Study

Read Luke’s account of Paul’s voyage and shipwreck in Acts 27-28

single rudder hinged to the stern post, but by two great oars or paddles, one on each side of the stern” (*Wight, 278*).

The account of Paul’s voyage to Rome in Acts 27-28 is one of the most accurate records we have of ancient shipping.

Journeys of All Time

The Bible is full of *journeys*. With a guiding hand and a watchful eye, the LORD sees the movements of the earth. Consider these journeys and how the LORD’s hand was evident:

Mary and Joseph’s Journey to Bethlehem
The Flight into Egypt
The Exodus
Jacob Takes His Family to Egypt
The Disciples Crossing the Sea of Galilee
Jonah Travels Away From Ninevah
The Missionary Journeys of Peter
The Missionary Journeys of Paul



Consider also the miles we travel in a given year. Miles by car, air, rail, maybe even ship. We ask the LORD to care for us in our travels as He has cared for travelers in times past.

We also remember that we are all on a journey heavenward, and may we never be distracted from *that* goal, for it took Christ Himself to make that journey possible— it took the shedding of His own blood.

Resources

Manners and Customs of Bible Lands by Fred H. Wight

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