

BIBLICAL MANNERS AND CUSTOMS BOOKS

The Bible is an Eastern book. The manners and customs of the people who lived in Biblical times are much different from those of Western civilization. These manners and customs are an integral part of many of the events recorded in the Scripture. Some of these customs are still practiced today. An understanding of Eastern manners and customs, sometimes referred to as “orientalisms,” is essential to rightly divide God’s Word. There have been a number of books written about these customs to aid us in our understanding of Biblical records and to clarify scriptures that may not make any sense to those of us who were raised in the Western world. Knowing more about Eastern culture will enhance our understanding of the Scriptures.

The Way International Bookstore currently sells seven books on Biblical manners and customs:

Light through an Eastern Window, by Bishop K. C. Pillai
Orientalisms of the Bible, Volume I, by Bishop K. C. Pillai
Orientalisms of the Bible, Volume II, by Bishop K. C. Pillai
Manners and Customs of the Bible, by James M. Freeman
Strange Scriptures That Perplex the Western Mind, by Barbara M. Bowen
On the Trail of Manners and Customs of the Bible, Volume I, by Bernita Jess
On the Trail of Manners and Customs of the Bible, Volume II, by Bernita Jess

We also have an *Orientalisms Scripture Index* to aid in finding scripture references in the books listed above.

Three of the above books, *Light through an Eastern Window* and *Orientalisms of the Bible*, Volumes I and II, were written by Bishop K. C. Pillai, a Hindu convert to Christianity from India. He was raised in an Eastern culture similar to the Biblical culture and was able to recognize many of the orientalisms in the Bible and teach them to Westerners. His books contain a variety of studies on different topics from the Bible and Biblical culture. Each book has a scripture index in the back. In addition, all are referenced in the *Orientalisms Scripture Index*.

Manners and Customs of the Bible, by James M. Freeman, is an extensive compilation of information on Biblical manners and customs from a wide variety of sources. The topics covered are many, from “Birthright” to “Arrangements for Burial.” There are engravings that illustrate many of the topics discussed. The book includes an analytical index, a scripture index, and a topical index.

Strange Scriptures That Perplex the Western Mind, by Barbara M. Bowen, is a book much like *Manners and Customs* although not nearly as extensive. A range of different topics is covered, and there is a scripture index in the back of the book.

On the Trail of Manners and Customs of the Bible, Volumes I and II, by Bernita Jess, are the newest additions to our Biblical manners and customs books. Mrs. Jess contributed to our ministry in the fields of Eastern customs and Aramaic research beginning in 1964. In 1990, she began to write regularly for *The Way Magazine* on Manners and Customs of the Bible. The twenty-five chapters of Volume I are based on many of the magazine articles that were published through 1995. The second volume of twenty-five chapters draws from articles published through 2001. Each book contains a scripture index and a bibliography to aid in further research.

Following is an example of how we can utilize these wonderful resources in our Biblical study. When reading the Book of Job you come to Job 9:33, where the concept of a “daysman” is introduced. What is a daysman? What more can we learn about the daysman? These books on Biblical manners and customs can shed additional light on what a daysman was in the Eastern culture.

The place to begin is in the *Orientalisms Scripture Index*. For Job 9:33, there are three books referenced: LTEW, *Light through an Eastern Window*, page 75; MCB, *Manners and Customs of the Bible*, page 41; and OB-2, *Orientalisms of the Bible*, Volume II, page 25.

Let’s start by looking up the last named reference, page 25 in *Orientalisms of the Bible*, Volume II. Near the bottom of the page is the information you are looking for:

The wise man is honored all over the world, no matter what nationality he belongs to. The wise man is always a loving man, interested in everybody. He is the daysman in Job 9:33 who reasons, reprovcs, and decides. I call him the “heart” man in Sanskrit, the great soul.

Now we have some additional insight into the daysman. He is a mediator who reasons, reprovcs, and decides.

Next look in *Manners and Customs of the Bible*, section 63, which begins on page 40. Here there is a discussion of “Covenant Stones.” This is regarding the use of stones, blood, and the help of a third party in making a covenant. At the end of this section on page 41 is the statement “Some think that Job refers to this custom when he speaks of ‘a daysman.’ See Job ix, 33.” This information on covenant stones may be applicable to other records in the Scripture but does not fit with the context of this section in Job. Books on Biblical manners and customs will differ at times on the nature and meaning of an Eastern custom or mannerism. Like any other reference book, the information is not God-breathed. It has to be evaluated in light of Biblical research principles. The individual working God’s Word has to decide (with the assistance of other capable people in the household) what best fits with the overall context of the Word.

Finally, look in *Light through an Eastern Window*. Beginning on page 75 there is an extensive discussion of the daysman. He is “a wise man, well versed in the Scriptures, who acts to reconcile the wrongdoer with the wronged.” The account of a daysman given in this book provides great background information on who a daysman was in the Eastern culture and how he functioned. It brings to life the kind of man Job was looking for, a man to mediate between God and him.

Take some time to simply read these books in addition to using them for reference with the index. They will increase your knowledge and understanding of God’s Word.