
The Origins of Hospitality and Tourism

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 Published by Goodfellow Publishers Limited, Woodeaton, Oxford, OX3 9TJ
<http://www.goodfellowpublishers.com>

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Judaeo-Christian Origins

The oldest collections of texts that refer to hospitality are from a literary genre known as Ancient Near East Texts. These texts belong to a large family of Eastern Mediterranean traditions from Mesopotamia, Asia Minor, Syria-Palestine, and Egypt. Normally these texts are seen in parallel with the Old Testament. These texts provide examples of Ancient Near East hospitality, where the host is attentive to those they have found in their house. A more readily and universally available collection of texts is the compilation known as the Old and New Testaments of the Bible.

3.1 The Old Testament

Within the Old Testament, numerous references exist to the practice of hospitality and serve as hosts, and to treating human life with respect and dignity. Janzen (2002) observes in the Book of Genesis, God offers the newly created world as living space and its plants and trees as food to all living creatures; they are to be guests in God's world and at God's table. In other words, while enjoying God's gracious provisions, God's human guests are to preserve awareness of and respect God's ultimate ownership. The story goes on to relate the 'fall of man' and the expulsion from Eden. Adam and Eve eating from the forbidden tree is an act of disobedience therefore sin in this situation can be defined as disobedience. Janzen then makes the challenging observation that Adam and Eve are saying 'we (humanity) want unlimited use and control of the world. In this light, sin can be described as the human attempt to be owners, rather than guests' (2002, p. 6).

In the Old Testament many laws specifically require hospitality and concern for strangers (see for example Leviticus 19:33-34). Other laws, often associated with those concerning strangers, assure good treatment of weak members of society, and laws concerning redemption are framed in accordance with the spirit of hospitality. Abraham was central to Old Testament hospitality; he showed unreserved hospitality to the strangers, only later seeing the true nature of his guests. Hospitality, and in particular,

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