

# Illustrated Bible Life

## A Word About the Art

Over the years, we have printed a lot of artwork in *Illustrated Bible Life*. In Western society, until quite recently, religious themes comprised the most popular subjects for art. So, there is a lot of art to choose from. The earliest Christian art was still close enough in time to the New Testament for us to be able to learn about that culture from the art (for instance, they type of clothing they wore, the items they used, etc.), but as time passed, Christian art took on a more deliberate form.

If you compare artwork of a particular story like the sacrifice of Isaac, for instance, you'll see some variation of Abraham brandishing a knife over a bound Isaac. An angel hovers nearby, with arms outstretched to prevent Abraham from striking. Nearby, a ram is caught in a thicket. Even the colors in the paintings are similar. As time passed, the details became less what they would have been like, and more indicative of what the painter imagined them to be. Eventually, painters were depicting the settings and clothing biblical figures in the dress and accessories of their own time.

Another example is the conversion of Paul. Most paintings depict Paul lying on the ground near a horse—presumably one he had been riding—with a few companions nearby and a bright light striking him in the face. Never mind that Paul probably was not riding a horse—horses were mostly the property of important government officials and soldiers and the very wealthy. Most people in ancient times walked to their destinations, no matter how far. If they were rich, they might have a donkey, but animals were usually enlisted to carry loads rather than people. Typically, only the very young or feeble would have ridden an animal. A healthy young man like Paul may have had pack animals with him, but he likely was on foot as he traveled to Damascus.

Most of the artwork in this issue is from the 15th century and beyond. I have to admit a fondness for art that depicts the emotion of the story. The expression on Stephen's face as he is about to be stoned captures the peace he seems to have had in that last hour of his life (see p. 55). On the other hand, you may also notice that the cassock he is wearing is typical of an Italian cleric of the 17th century rather than a first-century disciple. It is because of the inaccuracy of the clothing that you will often see another type of art in this publication—that of artists like James Tissot (e.g., p. 30) and William Brassey Hole (e.g., page 18) both of whom illustrated Bible books in the late 19th—early 20th centuries.

Archaeology was a new science at that time. Because of this, artists have been able to recreate the clothing and scenery that may well have existed in those long-ago centuries. Today, an artist like Balage Balogh (who painted Solomon's temple on p. 9 and Ezra reading the book of the law on p. 26) can achieve great accuracy because of archaeological discoveries.