

# Research Notes

## Story 28 – The Last Supper

### Washing Feet

Most people in the time of Jesus wore sandals, and most travel was done by walking. A person's feet generally became very dirty during their journey. It was a common act of hospitality, therefore, when a visitor came, to provide him with water for the washing of his feet.

If a man had servants, one of them would wash the guests' feet. And generally it was the servant's role to wash the master's feet.

Jesus washing his disciples' feet was meant to teach a lesson. After He finished this symbolic act, the Lord asked, "Do you know what I have done unto you?" (John 13:12). Certainly they knew what he had done physically, but they had not understood the real significance of the act, so Jesus explained it to them. There was a lesson to be conveyed. Basically Jesus was saying, "If I, your Lord, have humbled myself, assuming the role of a servant, you ought to do the same. The Son of God was demonstrating a servant's spirit.

When Jesus began to wash the feet of his disciples, they were shocked, but His actions served as a model of humility. This passage emphasizes inner humility, not necessarily a physical act. A Christian widow's practice of "washing the feet of the saints" (I Timothy 5:10) speaks not of her involvement in a church ordinance but of her humble slave-like service to other believers.

### History of Passover

Passover is one of the most important Jewish holidays. It celebrates the protection that God offered to the Jews during the time when they were enslaved in Egypt. See Exodus 12 for the full story.

Moses had asked the Egyptian pharaoh repeatedly to free the Jews from their servitude, and he had refused. Because of the pharaoh's refusal to free the Jews, God brought ten plagues down upon Egypt. The final plague was that every firstborn son would die, whether person or animal. The Jews were instructed to protect their firstborn children by killing a lamb and putting its blood on the doorposts and above their doors. Doing this would insure that when God came through the land to carry out the plague, He would "pass over" them, and their firstborn would be safe. When God brought this last plague upon the Egyptians, they permitted the Jews to leave Egypt. After that, the Passover was celebrated every year with a great feast in Jerusalem.

When Jesus celebrated the Passover with his disciples, it is likely that their time together included several Jewish traditions. The meal would have included foods that symbolized the meaning of the Passover:

- Roasted lamb represented the lamb whose blood was on the houses of the Israelites – a reminder that there had to be a blood sacrifice to save their lives.
- Unleavened bread reminded them of when they were forced to flee from Egypt in such great haste that they did not have time to wait for their bread to rise.
- Bitter herbs (plants) symbolized that when the Israelites were slaves in Egypt, their lives were made bitter in bondage.

At a Passover meal, friends gather around the table and read the story of the Israelites leaving Egypt. The meal goes on until late at night, with the participants discussing the meaning of various passages and singing special Passover songs. It is not surprising that Jesus and his disciples finished their time in the upper room by singing a hymn and then going out to the Mount of Olives.

## **Participating in a Seder**

The Seder, a family meal, is the central celebration of the Passover. The origin of the word seder is a Hebrew root word meaning "order." There is a specific set of information that must be covered in a specific order. Every person around the table has a booklet (hagadda) containing the printed order of service, reading, and songs. They go through the meal and the retelling of the story of the Israelites leaving Egypt in first person as if they had been one of the slaves freed from Pharaoh's bondage. Parts of the story are illustrated with singing.

The entire extended family comes together. The mother of the home lights the candles that signal the beginning of the Passover. The leader of the family ( usually the father or grandfather) will go around the room asking each person at the table to reconstruct a part of the story. "What do you remember about your leaving Egypt?" Each person will tell a part as if he had been a slave, as if he had actually seen the plagues, and as if he personally escaped out of Egyptian slavery.