

TWEVLE NEW TEACHERS FOR TWELVE OLD TRIBES

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John 13:1-20

¹ Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.

After the recent events discussed in the previous chapter, it was clear to Jesus that this would be the last Passover he would spend with his beloved disciples. You may recall that he had come to this decision when the God-fearing Greeks sought him out (To read that section click [HERE](#)). The content of this chapter comes on the heels of the previous confrontation with *the hoi Ioudaioi*, and Jesus' presentation of himself as the good shepherd. There he accused the current leadership of Israel of being the evil shepherds who did not care for the sheep (See previous discussion about this [HERE](#)). This verse begins by stating that as the Good Shepherd of Israel, Jesus loved his own sheep with the highest commitment and dedication possible.

² During supper, when the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him, ³ Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God, ⁴ rose from supper. He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist. ⁵ Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around him.

It is clear in this passage, one of his last interactions with his disciples that Jesus wanted to personally model something very important. However, it is crucial that we don't see this as simply his personal example for all believers (while the principle of course applies to everyone). The supper was very special, because it was one of Jesus' last training sessions with the new leadership of Israel he was about to leave in his place. This is in contrast to today, when in many churches apostles and their

office are not considered to be of much importance.

The number twelve was not coincidental. Jesus chose twelve apostles because his plan included the full renewal of Israel. The 12 heads of the tribes of Israel were to be replaced by the 12 Jewish apostles who would lead Israel into the renewed future defined by redemption.

Just read this description of the New Jerusalem:

"It had a large, high wall with twelve gates. Twelve angels were at the gates, and the names of the twelve tribes of Israel were written on the gates. There were three gates on the east, three gates on the north, three gates on the south, and three gates on the west. The wall of the city had twelve foundations, and the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the lamb were written on them." (Rev.21:12-14)

So as we read in vs. 3 "knowing that that the Father had given all things into his hands" Jesus rose up to wash up the feet of his disciples. As we noted earlier, this was one of the last and most important leadership training sessions he would have with those who were to become the good shepherds of Israel. They were to rule Israel with compassion, care and a sense of ownership. This was in contrast to the "bad shepherds" Jesus had come to replace. We must not move forward before at least mentioning the fact that God had given everything into Jesus' hands did not mean that now people should serve him (a rather logical conclusion), but that He should now serve them.

⁶ He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, do you wash my feet?" ⁷ Jesus answered him, "What I am doing you do not understand now, but afterward you will understand." ⁸ Peter said to him, "You shall never wash my feet." Jesus answered him, "If I do not wash you, you have no share with me." ⁹ Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!" ¹⁰ Jesus said to him, "The one who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but is completely clean. And you are clean, but not every one of you." ¹¹ For he knew who was to betray him; that was why he said, "Not all of you

are clean.” ¹² When he had washed their feet and put on his outer garments and resumed his place, he said to them, “Do you understand what I have done to you? ¹³ You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. ¹⁴ If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. ¹⁵ For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you.

Peter makes his opposition known by simply voicing the bewilderment of other disciples. Jesus answers him that unless he lets Jesus wash his feet, Peter would not be able to share in the crucial service of the good shepherds. Peter, perhaps, thinking that Jesus is talking about ceremonial water cleansing offers to go through the entire ceremony (mikvah). Jesus specifies that he does not have the water ceremony in mind, rather that he only requires his leader-servants to have hearts of humility and utter commitment to serve God’s people. Jesus would later challenge Peter by the context of Ezekiel’s prophecy of the evil of shepherds of Israel: “Feed my sheep!” (Ezek.34)

¹⁶ Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him.

It was either the task of the youngest family member or a servant to wash the dusty feet of newly arrived guests coming into a house from the outside. Jesus carried out the job of the servant. The disciples were Jesus’ servants. The conclusion was inescapable. If he did it, how much more should they be willing to do the same! They must become trustworthy and not self-seeking to be able to truly be shepherds of God’s people – Israel.

¹⁷ If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them. ¹⁸ I am not speaking of all of you; I know whom I have chosen. But the Scripture will be fulfilled, ‘He who ate my bread has lifted his heel against me.’ ¹⁹ I am telling you this now, before it takes place, that when it does take place you may believe that I am he.

Though this is not his focus, Jesus predicts future events.

Everything was done so that the Apostles would be strengthened in their faith before a time of very difficult service (for most ending with martyrdom) that lay ahead of them.

²⁰ Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever receives the one I send receives me, and whoever receives me receives the one who sent me."

In this concluding remark, Jesus once again shows the importance of the twelve apostles he was leaving in his place. He gave them all the authority necessary to rule. Receiving them would mean receiving Jesus; just as receiving Jesus meant receiving his Father. It follows, therefore, that whoever receives one of the twelve apostles receives God Himself.

The post **Twelve new leaders for twelve old tribes (John 13:1-20)** appeared first on **Jewish Studies for Christians, Dr. Eli's Study Group**.