

# Bible Study

## September 14, 2018

### Topic – Hospitality

#### Obligation

Both Old and New Testaments vividly reflect hospitality as a sacred duty. Hotels and restaurants were not common in biblical days, hence travelers were dependent on others for hospitality. Offering a stranger a meal was more than providing food for him; it was a commitment to the stranger's safety and well-being. But a major reason for showing hospitality was the belief that visitors had been sent by God. Abraham reflected this sense of hospitality in providing a lavish meal for his heavenly visitors (Gen. 18:1-8). Lot went to wrongful lengths to protect his angelic visitors when he offered his daughters to the debased men at Sodom (Gen. 19:1-11). In a time of warfare, Jael betrayed her appearance of hospitality when she killed Sisera after offering him lodging (Judg. 4:17-21). The New Testament also admonishes believers to practice hospitality (Rom. 12:13).



"Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it" (Heb. 13:2).

#### Greeting

There were several kinds of greetings in biblical times. One form was verbal, "Rejoice," "Hello," or "Greetings!" (Gk. *chaire*) (Matt. 26:49; 28:9), or "Peace be with you" (cf. 1 Sam. 25:6, NASB; John 20:19). When Jesus sent them on their mission, the seventy bestowed the same greeting upon the household. This was more than a casual hello; it was a benediction, invoking God's blessing upon the household, particularly if they were God's own (Luke 10:5; cf. John 14:27).



Examine Genesis 19:1-2, "The two angels arrived at Sodom in the evening, and Lot was sitting in the gateway of the city. When he saw them, he got up to meet them and bowed down with his face to the ground. 'My Lords,' he said, 'please turn aside to your servant's house. You can wash your feet and spend the night and then go on your way early in the morning.'" What can you learn about greeting and hospitality from these verses?

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There was also the customary kiss of greeting upon entering a home—grasping the person on the shoulders, drawing him near, and kissing him on the right cheek and then on the left (Luke 7:45). Samuel kissed Saul when he anointed him (1 Sam. 10:1). Paul admonished believers to "greet one another with a holy kiss" (Rom. 16:16). In Christian circles the kiss took on new meaning: it became a symbol of Christians' love for one another; it was "a kiss of love" (1 Pet. 5:14; cf. 1 Cor. 16:20; 2 Cor. 13:12; 1 Thess. 5:26).



How much thought do we give to the physical and spiritual well-being of people we meet? We frequently say, "How are you?" but we really don't want an answer! How can we develop a greater concern for the people we meet?

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Arab women and children kiss the beards of their husbands and fathers, who respond by kissing the forehead.

As a sign of affection, near relatives of both sexes would kiss one another (Gen. 29:11; Song of Sol. 8:1; cf. Gen. 27:27; 33:4; 45:15; Exod. 4:27; Luke 15:20).

When an honored guest appeared, people would bow in honor of the special visitor. Abraham bowed down in the presence of his divine guests (Gen. 18:2), as did Lot (Gen. 19:1). In purchasing the cave of Machpelah as a tomb for Sarah, Abraham bowed before the people (Gen. 23:12). This practice is still common in Oriental culture today. When Cornelius prostrated himself before Peter, the apostle rejected the gesture, reminding him, "Stand up, ...I am only a man being myself" (Acts 10:26).

## **Washing the Feet**

In biblical times it was customary to remove one's sandals upon entering a house. This was essential since the people would sit cross-legged on a rug, with the feet beneath the person; the sandals would soil both the clothes and the rug. Hence, when Moses approached the burning bush, the Lord instructed him to remove his sandals from his feet since otherwise he would defile the holy ground where he was standing (Exod. 3:5).

Upon entering a home it was customary for a servant to wash the visitor's feet, essential because of the dusty streets. The servant would pour water over the feet into a basin and wipe the feet with a towel. Jesus assumed the position of a servant when He washed the proud disciples' feet, giving them a vital lesson in life and service (John 13:1-15).

## **Entertaining**

In entertaining, the guest was received into the central compartment of the tent which was the reception area. For example, when Abraham hosted his divine visitors in the reception compartment, Sarah was listening in the women's compartment (Gen. 18:9-10). Men would dine with the male visitor and also sleep with him in this compartment; it was considered ill-mannered to allow the visitor to sleep alone. In a single-room cottage, the visitor would dine in the same room where everyone also slept. Sometimes a village had a public guest room where only male visitors were accommodated. If a family was traveling, they would wait at a public

well or the city gate until someone invited them to stay in their home (Gen. 24:13-14; Judg. 19:15). In a larger house a separate room was provided for the guest (2 Kings 4:10).

## **Banquets**

### **Invitation**

There were two invitations to the banquet, one well in advance of the event and another the day of the banquet—each by a special messenger. Jesus illustrated the banquet invitation in the parable of the marriage feast (Matt. 22:1-13). The second invitation went to "those who had been invited," but they scorned the invitation (Matt. 22:3). This was a most serious breach of etiquette, and the host would not take this lightly (Matt. 22:7-13).



To accept the first invitation and scorn the second was the height of insult—tantamount to war.

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### **Arrangement at the Table**

Banquets were reserved for special occasions of celebration—a wedding (Matt. 22:2), the visit of special guests (Gen. 18:1-8), the return of a son (Luke 15:22-24). During early Old Testament times, people ate formal meals while sitting cross-legged on a mat; later, during the kingdoms of Israel and Judah, people sat at a table on chairs or on couches. But in New Testament times the guests reclined on a triclinium—couches for three around a low U-shaped table. The guests would lie on their left side, with their head toward the table and their legs away from the table, supporting themselves on their left arm while using the right hand for eating. In that way a servant could wash the guests' feet (Luke 7:36-38). In this position the guests reclined facing the back of the person beside. Hence, John was reclining on Jesus' right side, described as "reclining on Jesus' bosom" (John 13:23, NASB). A servant would serve food and wait on the guests. In homes the place of honor was on the raised platform, while others reclined at the lower level. The host reclined at the junction of the two U arms with places of honor at his right and his left. The chief place of honor was at the host's left.

### **Dining**

The banquet was lavish. Musicians were frequently present, playing their musical instruments (cf. Amos 6:5). Wine was served (Amos 6:6). The choicest lambs from the flock were roasted and eaten (1 Sam. 9:24), along with cheeses, vegetables, dates, honey, and figs. Dancing was also provided for entertainment (dancing was individual) (Mark 6:22). A cloth was hung from the house throughout the preliminary three courses of the meal, signaling that the invited guests were welcome. Sometimes poor people from the street were invited to the banquet (Matt. 22:9).



At the Last Supper Judas had the chief place of honor. In this way Jesus could have spoken to Judas, identifying him as the traitor without the other apostles hearing it (Matt. 26:25). Since Judas was in the place of honor, Jesus gave him a sop, a special indication of favor—here probably a last offer of grace (John 13:26).

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During the banquet the host would dip a piece of flat, pancake-type bread (torn from a large "sheet" of bread) into the common bowl of lamb, herbs, and spices and make a "sop" and give it to the guest (cf. John 13:26). The Passover haroseth was a sauce of raisins, dates, and sour wine, sometimes a side dish used by three or four people (Mark 14:20).



As Jesus offered the sop as a final offer of grace to Judas, so there comes a final offer of grace—the last time an unbeliever hears the gospel before death. It could be that you have never trusted Jesus Christ as your personal Savior. This could be your last offer of grace. Why delay? Do not go out into the eternal night of darkness. Trust the Savior today!

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Guests ate with their fingers; spoons were used only for soup. There were no forks. There is a saying in the Middle East, "Why should a man use a fork when he has so many fingers?"



This position in dining is both a picture of the believer's bliss in heaven (Luke 16:22) and the millennial kingdom (Matt. 8:11).

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