

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

PayPal

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Expositor* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_expositor-series-1.php

“the vanity” of human life, nothing but the serene expression of faith :—

It is vain for you, ye that rise up early, ye that late take rest,
That ye eat the bread of toil :
So He giveth his beloved sleep.

J. J. STEWART PEROWNE.

BEFORE THE FEAST OF THE PASSOVER:
A REPLY.

A WRITER in the June number of this Magazine proposes to reconcile John xiii. 1 ff. with the opinion that the Lord's Supper was instituted on the night following the 14th Nisan, *i.e.*, at the time when the Jews ate the Paschal Lamb, by supposing that “‘*before the feast of the Passover*’ means ‘before the seven days’ feast’ which succeeds to the Paschal sacrifice and supper.”

This supposition requires us to believe that the Paschal Supper was no part of the *Feast of the Passover*. For “*Before the feast of the passover*” in John xiii. 1 certainly means, Before the feast began. But is any one prepared to believe this? Certainly not until proof is given that the seven days’ feast is called, even in distinction from the Paschal Supper, *the feast of the passover*. But of this no shadow of proof is given in the paper before us. Indeed, in one passage quoted there from Josephus (*Ant.* iii. 10. 5), “The feast of unleavened bread succeeds that of the Passover,” we find the very words of John xiii. 1 used to distinguish the Paschal Supper from the days following.

On page 476 the writer admits that the night of the Supper “belonged to the 15th Nisan, the first day of the feast.” But immediately afterwards he writes as though the Supper belonged to the preceding day, the

14th Nisan ; and then gives proofs that the 15th Nisan and following days were called, in distinction to the day before, "the feast." To give weight to these proofs he says (p. 480) that "on the 15th, in the morning, the seven days' feast began."

This last statement is not only given without proof, but is in direct contradiction to Exodus xiii. 18, "*On the fourteenth day of the month at even ye shall eat unleavened bread, until the one and twentieth day of the month at even.*" This passage teaches plainly that the Paschal Supper was eaten during the seven days of unleavened bread. From it we also infer that the reckoning of days, at least for sacred purposes, began in the evening. And, if so, the lamb was slain at the close of the 14th Nisan, and was eaten at the beginning of the 15th Nisan. Hence the sacrifice of the Passover was on the former, the feast of the Passover was on the latter, of these days. And of the feast of the Passover, strictly so called, the seven days' feast of unleavened bread was an expansion. And this is all that is implied in the many quotations of the paper before us.

Mr. Lewin's suggestion (*Fasti Sacri*, xxxiii.) that *Before the feast* refers to the time when the Supper was set on the table, rests upon the very doubtful reading, *γενομένου*, rejected by Dr. Westcott in the *Speaker's Commentary*, and a very doubtful rendering of it. The better reading and rendering is, *While supper was going on.*

I may point out in passing that the word "commencement" in Dr. Westcott's note on John xiii. 1 is either a misprint or an oversight. He means the evening following the 13th Nisan, twenty-four hours before the Jews' Paschal Supper.

In spite of Mr. Lewin's explanation of John xiii. 29,

Buy the things of which we have need for the feast, I must say that it is much more easy to reconcile these words with the supposition that the chief event of the feast had not yet begun, than to suppose that our Lord would request Judas to make purchases during the sacred festal hours of the great festal sabbath.

The writer of the paper I am venturing to discuss does not mention John xviii. 28, "*Might eat the pass-over.*" Had these words referred to the seven days' feast, of which the most important part had already taken place, I think that the present subjunctive rather than the aorist would have been used.

Nor does our writer refer to John xix. 14, 31, 42, where we learn that the bodies were removed from the cross because the day was *the preparation, the preparation of the passover*. This emphatic repetition implies clearly that to the Jews the day which followed was holier than that on which Christ was put to death. But the 15th Nisan was the holiest day in the year, the anniversary of the nation's miraculous birth. On whatsoever day of the week it fell, it was kept as, and was called, a sabbath. So Exodus xii. 16; Leviticus xxiii. 11, 15. Throughout Leviticus xxiii. the festal days of rest are called sabbaths. These festal sabbaths we, who are so familiar with the weekly sabbath, are apt to overlook. Now if Christ died on the 14th Nisan, and if, as all tradition asserts, the day following was a weekly sabbath, that sabbath would be indeed *great*, as being also the greatest festal sabbath. But if Christ died on the 15th Nisan, the day following, even if it were a weekly sabbath, would be a less solemn day than the day before it. Surely the greatest day in the Jewish calendar would not be spoken of, as in all the gospels, merely as a *preparation day*.

This argument is not weakened by Matthew xxvii. 62, where the great sabbath is spoken of as the day *after the preparation*. For this was written from a Christian point of view, in which the famous preparation day on which Christ died had far more importance than the great sabbath which followed it.

If now we put together the emphatic, because unexpected, specification of time in John xiii. 1, the desire of Christ's enemies to avoid defilement in order to eat the Passover, the mention three times of the day of Christ's death as a preparation day—and this as a reason for the removal of his body—and the remark that the day following was a great day, we cannot doubt that the writer of the fourth gospel, whom I firmly believe to be the beloved Apostle, meant to say that the Last Supper was eaten on the night (Exodus xii. 8) preceding the day (14th Nisan) on which the Paschal Lamb was slain. In this case *our passover was sacrificed, even Christ* (1 Corinthians v. 7), at the time when the Jews were offering the symbolic but now needless victim.

The custom of the early Church, referred to in the paper before us, supports this view. For it was admitted almost unanimously by the early Churches that Christ died on the 14th Nisan. But it was disputed whether the day of commemoration should be reckoned according to the day of the week or of the month.

I must acknowledge that in this short paper I have done nothing to solve the great difficulty connected with the question I have discussed. But I think that I have shewn that the solution is not to be found in the direction in which the writer before us seeks it.