

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 age for entering on the religious life ; and this belief was probably not without influence on Paul when he fixed that term for the order of Widows. But of course the age was merely permissive, not a regulation of duty.

W. M. RAMSAY.

THE HISTORICAL VALUE OF THE FOURTH GOSPEL.

IX. THE TRIUMPHAL ENTRY, AND THE LAST SUPPER.

WE will now pass to consider the account given in the Fourth Gospel of the triumphal entry into Jerusalem. It is often said that this Gospel exhibits an obvious exaggeration in the matter of miracle. It may be well, then, to point out that here at any rate there is a very marked absence of anything of the kind. There is nothing said of the prevision of Jesus in the matter of the finding of the ass's colt. Our Evangelist merely says that Jesus, having found a young ass, sat thereon. The writer does not say whether or not the Synoptic account of the finding of the ass is correct. Further, there is something very natural about the whole incident as it is told in his Gospel. The impression we get from the Synoptists is that Jesus was accompanied by a great crowd of people as He travelled towards Jerusalem, these having been with Him all the way. We learn from St. John that the multitude that had come to the feast in Jerusalem hearing that Jesus was coming to the city went out to meet Him and greeted Him with "Hosanna ; Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel." In regard to the use of this greeting Edersheim writes :¹ "It must be remembered that, according to Jewish tradition, Psalm cxviii. 25-28, was also chanted antiphonally by the people of Israel, as they went

¹ *Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, ii. p. 368.

to welcome the festive pilgrims on their arrival, the latter always responding in the second clause of each verse, till the last verse of the Psalm was reached, which was sung by both parties in unison, Psalm ciii. 17 being added by way of conclusion."

It would seem, then, that our Evangelist gives us an accurate picture of the occurrence. The multitude came out to meet Jesus to give Him a special welcome because, according to the Evangelist, they had heard of the miracle which He had wrought. He says: "The multitude therefore that was with him when he called Lazarus out of the tomb, and raised him from the dead, bare witness. For this cause also the multitude went and met him, for that they heard that he had done this sign."

Now this point is certainly not brought out in the Synoptic account. There is mention of the multitudes that went before and that followed, but we should not gather from this, without the help of the Fourth Gospel, that those before were they who had come out from Jerusalem to welcome Jesus and were now escorting Him in triumph into the city.

And though St. John says that this entry of the King into the city accorded with the words of the prophet, "Fear not, daughter of Zion: behold thy King cometh, sitting on an ass's colt," he tells us that the disciples did not at the time understand the significance of the event. "These things understood not his disciples at the first; but when Jesus was glorified, then remembered they that these things were written by him, and that they had done these things unto him." We compare this statement with those others in ii. 17, 22, where we have already seen the writer able to speak in the name of the disciples. This statement, like those others, is at once intelligible if the Evangelist be the Apostle St. John.

I do not think that more need be said of the triumphal entry. It remains now to consider our Evangelist's account of the Last Supper, this being the last of the events that he has in common with the Synoptists.

There is first of all the question of the connexion of this Supper with the feast of the Passover. Our Evangelist says nothing about it being a Passover celebration. Indeed it is clear from his narrative of subsequent events that he certainly did *not* regard it as the Passover. For in xviii. 28 he says that the accusers of Jesus would not enter the pretorium that they might not be defiled, *but might eat the passover*. Again he remarks incidentally in xix. 14, that when Pilate sat on the judgement seat at a place called in Hebrew Gabbatha, it was the Preparation of the Passover. In xix. 31 and 42 he again speaks of the day of the crucifixion being the Preparation. Now while the use of the term "Preparation" in these last two verses might be interpreted by making it apply to Friday, *quâ* Friday, which was the Preparation for the Sabbath, it seems impossible to accept this interpretation in view of the other two verses to which reference has been made. I acknowledge that in taking up this position I have against me the emphatically expressed opinion of Edersheim, but I fail to see that he has proved his case. He thinks that there is no difference between the Synoptists and St. John as to the day of the month on which the Lord ate the Last Supper with His disciples. He considers that the language of the Fourth Evangelist does not preclude the possibility that that Supper was the Passover feast which was celebrated on the evening of Nisan 14. Thus he interprets the eating of the passover in xviii. 28 as having reference to the *Chagigah* on Nisan 15; but even if this be possible there is still the expression "the Preparation of the Passover" in xix. 14 to explain. Edersheim inter-

prets this to mean the Friday in Passover week. It would not then be the Preparation of the Passover itself, but the Preparation of the Sabbath of the week of the Passover. This, if a possible interpretation, seems hardly a natural one. And there is the incidental remark made by the Evangelist in xiii. 29, which tells against it. When Jesus had said to Judas at the Supper, That thou doest do quickly, the writer adds that no one at the table knew for what intent He spake thus to him. Some thought, because Judas had the bag, that Jesus said unto him, Buy what things we have need of for the feast. This seems to show that in the view of the writer the Supper at which they were sitting was not the Passover feast, for which preparations were yet to be made.

On the whole, then, I share the opinion of most scholars that the Fourth Gospel makes the crucifixion take place on the 14th Nisan, and that the feast of the Passover would be on the evening of that day. In this case we have a distinct difference between our Evangelist and the Synoptists, who appear to make the Last Supper a celebration of the Passover. Thus in Mark we read: "On the first day of unleavened bread, when they sacrificed the passover, his disciples say unto him, Where wilt thou that we go and make ready that thou mayest eat the passover? And he sendeth two of his disciples, and saith unto them, Go into the city, and there shall meet you a man bearing a pitcher of water: follow him, and wheresoever he shall enter in, say to the goodman of the house, The Master saith, Where is my guestchamber, where I shall eat the passover with my disciples? . . . And the disciples went forth, and came into the city, and found as he had said unto them: and they made ready the passover. And when it was evening he cometh with the twelve." This account, somewhat abbreviated, is reproduced in Matthew ;

and St. Luke repeats it almost verbatim. The latter, however, has information about the Last Supper from some source other than Mark (St. Luke xxii. 14-38), and he represents Jesus as saying to His disciples, when He sat down with them: "With desire I have desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer; for I say unto you, I will not eat it until it be fulfilled in the kingdom of God." There are two very interesting notes on the meaning of this saying which are published in the *Journal of Theological Studies* for July 1908, by Professor Burkitt and the Rev. A. E. Brooke. Professor Burkitt certainly holds no brief for the Johannine authorship of the Fourth Gospel, but he takes the view, which Mr. Brooke shares, that these words in the mouth of Jesus imply that the meal of which Jesus and His disciples were then partaking was *not* the passover feast. Professor Burkitt takes our Lord to mean: "Near as this Passover is, and much as I have longed to celebrate it with you, it is not so to be, for I shall not eat it; within the next twenty-four hours the enemy will have done his worst, and the next Passover that I shall eat with you will be the Messianic Feast."

I may be allowed to say that this view, now put forward by Professor Burkitt and Mr. Brooke, is one that had occurred to me independently some time ago. The natural meaning of the words, taken by themselves, seemed to me to be just as Professor Burkitt has paraphrased them. The difficulty, however, was to reconcile this interpretation with St. Luke's unambiguous statement a few verses before that it was the Passover feast in which Jesus and His disciples were engaged.

But the explanation of the discrepancy is probably that which Professor Burkitt himself gives. St. Luke at least has two sources from which he derives his information. One is, of course, the Gospel according to Mark, which he

freely quotes. The other sources used by him may have supported a view inconsistent with that taken over from the Gospel of Mark. In other words, St. Luke's other sources may have regarded the Last Supper as *not* being the Passover.

Certainly the statement made in Mark xiv. 12 that they sacrificed the Passover on the first day of unleavened bread is an inaccurate one; for the first day of unleavened bread was the day after the Passover, viz., the 15th Nisan. If, then, the Gospel of Mark is inaccurate here, it may be also inaccurate in making the Last Supper a paschal celebration, this inaccuracy being taken over in Matthew and by St. Luke. So though the Fourth Evangelist differs from what is commonly called the Synoptic view of the date of the Last Supper, it may well be that he is right after all.

For, again, Mark, followed by Matthew, represents the chief priests, etc., as saying, when they were plotting to take Jesus and to put Him to death: "Not during the feast, lest haply there shall be a tumult of the people." But if the Last Supper were a Passover celebration, then it becomes clear that the Jewish authorities did the very thing which they decided not to do. It seems more likely than not, then, that the Fourth Evangelist is correct in not calling the Last Supper a Passover celebration. And it must be acknowledged that only one who was well informed could have thus corrected the error made in the other Gospels, for he does correct it, not by saying that the Last Supper was not a Passover, but by stating plainly that the Crucifixion took place on the day of the Preparation, the day, that is, on the evening of which the Passover took place.

We now pass from our Evangelist's dating of the Supper to what he has to say of what took place at it. His account

is, as every one knows, much fuller than that given by the other Evangelists and yet he omits all mention of the institution of the Eucharist. This, for some unaccountable reason, seems to give great offence to those who deny the apostolic authorship of the Gospel and discredit its historical character. They speak as if the Evangelist had somehow put the institution of the Lord's Supper out of its place, because in his Gospel Jesus is represented as teaching truth preparatory to it in the synagogue at Capernaum after the feeding of the five thousand (St. John vi.). But why should this discourse not have taken place as St. John records? Something of the kind seems almost a necessity. For what meaning otherwise could the disciples have attached to the words of Jesus when, as according to the Synoptists, He instituted the Eucharist at the Last Supper? When He said, "This is my body," "This is my blood," must there not have been some previous teaching which would prepare the minds of the disciples to hear such startling words? I have never been able to see why He who spake thus to the disciples at the Last Supper, and who is believed to have thus spoken because the Synoptists record the fact, should not have spoken a year before, as the Fourth Evangelist represents, in the synagogue at Capernaum. We have already seen that Schmiedel regards this discourse as unhistorical because it gives the meaning of the Eucharistic Supper a year before it took place, and the insertion of it appears to him therefore to detract from the historical value of the Gospel as a whole. But it is not a very exact statement of the case to say that the Capernaum discourse gives the meaning of the Eucharistic Supper before it took place. For the discourse makes no reference to the Eucharistic Supper. It certainly abounds in teaching preparatory to the institution of the Eucharist; but that is a different thing.

Though the Fourth Evangelist, in his full account of the Last Supper, says nothing of the institution of the Eucharist, it does not follow that he did not know it was instituted then. Such a supposition would be absurd. Instead of finding fault with him for not repeating what was already known, we ought rather to be grateful to him for telling us so much that was not generally known and which he, if he were an eye-witness, was in an exceptional position to record. And I cannot see that there is anything which he writes on the subject which is in the least degree improbable *a priori*. He tells of two incidents which the other Evangelists give us, namely, the foretelling of the betrayal by one of Jesus' disciples sitting with Him, and also that of the denial of Peter. It is true that Mark and Matthew put the latter after Jesus had left the upper room, but it is worthy of note that St. Luke, relying no doubt on some other trustworthy source, represents it, as our Evangelist does, as taking place at the Supper. And I fail to see how any one can read the story in the Fourth Gospel of the Lord's disclosure of the betrayal of Judas without being impressed by its historical likelihood. It is told, as only one who was present on the occasion could have told it, with a most remarkable minuteness of detail. When Jesus made the announcement that one of them would betray Him, our Evangelist gives us the picture of the disciples looking one on another in bewilderment, doubting of whom He spake. Then he tells us that there was at the table reclining in Jesus' bosom one of His disciples, whom Jesus loved. This would be John himself. To him Simon Peter beckoned that he might find out who it was. And he leaning back, as he was, on Jesus' breast saith unto Him, Lord, Who is it? And Jesus answered: He it is for whom I shall dip the sop and give it him. So He dipped the sop and gave it to Judas, the son of Simon

Iscariot. Nothing but prejudice against the Gospel as a whole could deny to this account real historical value. Who could have invented all these details on the ground of what the other Evangelists tell of the same event? The verisimilitude of our Evangelist is here past all question.

Nor is there anything at all improbable in the story of the washing of the disciples' feet on this occasion, followed by the exhortation to humility and service. For from St. Luke we learn that there had arisen a contention amongst the disciples which of them was to be accounted the greatest.

And the subsequent teaching given by Jesus is set forth in such a way that there seems no improbability that it was actually given. The difficulties which the disciples found in what He said to them are brought out. One after another questions him; and each time the disciple who addresses Him is mentioned by name. First it is Thomas: Lord, we know not whither thou goest, and how can we know the way? Then Philip: Lord, show us the Father, and it sufficeth us. And later it is Judas (not Iscariot): Lord, what is come to pass that thou wilt manifest thyself to us, and not unto the world? There is, it is true, one case where the disciples are said to have spoken collectively (xvi. 29), but this naming of individuals in three cases is not to be passed lightly over. It is at once explicable on the theory of the Johannine authorship.

It need not be claimed that the Evangelist is recording the *ipsissima verba*, or the Greek equivalent of the *ipsissima verba* of Jesus. But there seems no reason to doubt that we have in these chapters a faithful representation of the teaching of the Master on momentous subjects, given at a time when the minds of the disciples were receptive by reason of the solemnity of the occasion. Our author tells us of a promise made by Jesus that the Holy Spirit would bring to the remembrance of the disciples the things that

He had spoken to them. Why should we doubt that this disciple had found the promise fulfilled in his own case, and that the words of Jesus which he has recorded were indeed spoken by Him? If we have not preserved for us the letter, yet we may believe that we have what is more important, the spirit.

E. H. ASKWITH.

NATHAN AND DAVID.

THE KNOWLEDGE OF SIN UNDER THE OLD COVENANT.

SIN, according to the Christian definition, is an offence against a personal God. The term has no meaning for us apart from our thoughts about the Almighty, and indeed, without the manifestation of the will of God there can be no knowledge in man of sin and innocence. A sin is an act of self-assertion against God; it is the setting up of a human will against the Divine.

This view that sin is not a fall from an abstract ideal, but an offence against some person, has its roots in the Old Testament. There the verb "to sin" and the verb "to transgress" are both applied to offences even against *human* persons. The butler and the baker of the king of Egypt, in Hebrew phrase, *sinned* against their lord,¹ and Mesha, king of Moab, when he made his claim to independence, *transgressed* against Israel.² "Sin" was unthinkable for the Hebrew apart from the thought of the person offended by the sin, and in the vast majority of cases in which the two verbs are used the reference is to JEHOVAH.

Of David's devotion to the God of Israel there can be no doubt; it is safe to say that he desired to please Him, and to avoid sin. But though this be true, it must be added that David's account in the First Book of Samuel is charged with deeds of rapine and of blood,³ and in the Second Book

¹ Gen. xl. 1.

² 2 Kings i. 1.

³ 1 Sam. xxvii. 8-12.