

ST LUKE xxii 15, 16: WHAT IS THE GENERAL  
MEANING?

'WITH desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer!'—what is the general meaning of these familiar words of our Lord? If we are to be guided by the almost unanimous consensus of commentators there is no doubt at all. Naturally all are agreed that it is an expression of deep feeling, but the remarkable thing is that it should be so generally assumed to be an expression of thankfulness, of *attained* desire. The object of this Note is to suggest the direct opposite: I believe the words to be an expression of disappointment and regret. I believe 'this Passover' means 'the Paschal meal of this present year', not 'the meal now spread before us'.

Before going any further let me quote a few recent comments to shew how very generally held the opposite opinion is. To begin at the end: LOISY says of this very passage 'L'évangéliste considère évidemment la dernière cène comme un festin pascal' (*Évangiles synoptiques* ii 526). WELLHAUSEN is equally explicit: 'Lc hebt geflissentlich hervor, dass das Abendmahl das Pascha war. . . . Dass Jesus nicht bloss sein Verlangen nach dem Pascha spricht, sondern es auch wirklich mit den Jüngern isst, unterlässt er zu sagen, weil es sich von selbst versteht' (*Evangelium Lucae* 121). From English expositors two characteristically different selections will suffice: SALMON illustrates the construction of the verse by the parallel of a man stricken with disease who had doubted whether he should live over Christmas and who when the day comes says to his family 'How I have been longing to spend one more Christmas Day with you, but this will be the last' (*Human Element in the Gospels* p. 492); WESTCOTT quotes the sentence *I desired to eat this Passover with you*, and then goes on to say 'If these words stood alone, there can be no doubt that we should explain them of the Paschal meal taken at the legal time' (*Study of the Gospels* note to chap. vi p. 348).

But is this really the impression which Lk. xxii 15, 16 leaves on any one who will consider these verses by themselves? Our Lord says 'With desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; for I say unto you I shall not eat it until it be fulfilled in the Kingdom of God'. Does not the pathos of the saying imply that the desire is unfulfilled? Does our Lord not say in effect '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'.

Perhaps it will be objected that the general sense of Lk. xxii 15, 16 is to be determined by the whole narrative and, as St Luke has elsewhere plainly shewn that he adopts the so-called 'Synoptic' as opposed to the so-called 'Johannine' date of the Passion and Crucifixion, we must interpret the verses before us in such a way as to support the 'Synoptic' date. This consideration has doubtless been the dominant factor in the interpretation of single verses and expressions in the Synoptic narratives of the Passion which seem to conflict with the 'Synoptic' date, but I am sure it ought not to be pressed here. This is just one of the problems upon which clearer light has been thrown by the general advance of the last twenty years in the study of the Synoptic Problem. As long as it was possible to speak of the Synoptic tradition in a vague and general way, to regard, that is, the Synoptic Evangelists as writers who were giving individual expression to a common heritage, that common heritage being (roughly speaking) the matter that was common to all three, then, indeed, we were obliged to think of this common heritage as something consciously set forth by each of the Evangelists. But if, on the contrary, the common matter of the Synoptic Gospels is shared by the Evangelists in common simply because two of them have based their work on the other, then it may very well be that here and there the later Evangelists have followed their main source (i. e. Mark) mechanically, and that the other sources which they use support a view inconsistent with that which they have taken over from the Gospel of Mark. This is especially the case with the story of the Passion as told in Luke. In Lk. xxii-xxiv the use of Mark is indeed apparent, but Mark has ceased to be the main authority. From Mark are taken Lk. xxii 1-13, 18, 21-23, 39, 52, 53, and some other passages, such as the story of Simon the Cyrenian (Lk. xxiii 26), but the rest of the narrative seems to come from another source, and we have very little *a priori* right to assume that this source supported the date which is so strangely indicated in Mk. xiv 12.

There can be of course no doubt that in Mk. xiv 12 ('on the first day of the Unleavened Bread, when they used to sacrifice the Passover') the Evangelist does mean to imply that the Last Supper was a Paschal Feast. It is urged on the other side that the wording of this verse is in itself a contradiction in terms, and that it is inconsistent with other indications in the Marcan account which shew that the Crucifixion took place before the Feast had really begun.<sup>1</sup> It may

<sup>1</sup> See especially Mk. xiv 2, xv 21.

therefore be seriously questioned whether the theory that the Last Supper was the Paschal Meal had any existence before St Mark wrote his Gospel.

But to discuss this would go beyond the object of this Note, which is to express my conviction that it is hazardous to interpret St Luke's special source for the Passion Story in the light of the Marcan theory, and also to suggest that the saying of Jesus at the Supper which expresses His earnest desire to have kept the Passover Feast with His faithful followers does not imply that the Supper was a Paschal Meal, but rather that it was not a Paschal Meal.

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PROF. BURKITT suggested to me, when he discovered that I had independently arrived at the same conclusion which he has reached about the interpretation of Luke xxii 15, 16, that we should both write notes to the *J. T. S.* to call attention to what seems to both of us the natural meaning of the verses; especially as it would seem that we are in a minority of two on the subject. He has been kind enough to shew me his note, and I fear that I have little to add to what he has stated so clearly, except to express my complete agreement with his main conclusion, which had suggested itself to me three or four years ago. The history of the text of these and other cognate verses reflects the difficulty which was felt in interpreting such words in accordance with the so-called 'Synoptic' presentation of the Last Meal. It may be worth while to recall the evidence. In Luke xxii 16 the true text *οὐ μὴ φάγω* is found in **N A B C**<sup>vi</sup> **H L al'** sah cop. (I quote from Tischendorf. The Bohairic **ⲛⲓⲁⲟⲩⲟⲩⲁⲓ** is quite clear, and Horner quotes no variants in Bohairic MSS.) The reading of D (*οὐκέτι μὴ φάγομαι*, omitting the preceding *ὅτι*) perhaps recalls the Latin of the opposite page, 'iam non manducabo'. At any rate the evidence suggests Western modification of a probably harmonizing character. In ver. 18 *οὐ μὴ πῖω ἀπὸ τοῦ νῦν ἀπὸ τοῦ γενήματος τῆς ἀμπέλου κ.τ.λ.* is the better attested text, but the words *ἀπὸ τοῦ νῦν* are not found in **A C X Γ Δ Δ II** unc<sup>b</sup> al pler it<sup>pler</sup> vg syr<sup>sch</sup>. Turning to Mark xiv 25 (*οὐκέτι οὐ μὴ πῖω ἐκ τοῦ γενήματος κ.τ.λ.*) the evidence quoted for the omission of *οὐκέτι* is not inconsiderable (**N C D L** <sup>bacr\*</sup> *a c f k* em gat cop aeth). In St Matthew alone the corresponding phrase *ἀπ' ἄρτι* is undisputed.

It may also be worth pointing out that the earliest form of the Syriac, in which the Lucan account has been rearranged, leaves ver. 15 in its position at the beginning of the narrative, before there has been any mention of eating, or of distributing the bread.

Thus the saying which Luke alone records, if we consider its