

THE SEDER AND THE SUPPER

This essay takes as its main topic a comparison between the Last Supper and the Passover Haggadah, and began from an interested reading of the latter and the possible early traditions which it contains. It falls into four sections, an outline of the Seder service as we have it in the Mishnah tractate Pesahim, a comparison between the Seder and the Supper, a survey of some 'extra Supper' Passover motifs and finally the relation of the (Lord's) Supper to the 'breaking of the bread'. The most definitive work in recent years on the subject of the Last Supper is J. Jeremias', *The Eucharist Words of Jesus* and my debt to this will be obvious at many places. The study takes as a presupposition that the Supper was in fact a Passover meal, and since it is concerned with the relation of the Supper to the Seder, much of the necessary work on problems of introduction is bypassed, nor is the difficult question of the relation of the Last Supper to the Lord's Supper really gone into.

I

Section 10 of Mishnah Pesahim outlines for us the Seder service as it was around A.D. 200.¹ It acts as a kind of watershed by which we can decide what is later and what earlier, and since it is the latter which is important here we can use it in a tentative manner to outline what the Seder of the time of Jesus may have been like. It is of course a problem in itself how far one can use Rabbinic material for New Testament study since the Mishnah comes from a later period than the New Testament, although reflecting traditional and liturgical practice.

According to Pes. 10, the order of service went something like this; the first cup (kiddush cup) is prepared and the host pronounces two benedictions firstly over the day and then over the wine – thus according to the school of Shammai at least, while the school of Hillel reversed the order. There then follows the eating of the preliminary course, a kind of appetizer of green vegetables and after this the main meal is served – 10:3-4 unleavened bread, haroseth (a compound of crushed fruit and nuts in vinegar) and the Passover lamb, and the second cup prepared. According to Jeremias (p. 85) the meal proper was not begun until after the youngest son (or in cases of necessity a neighbour or the wife) had asked several questions based on a central question 'Why is this night different from all other nights?' – these are 'Why do we eat unleavened bread, why do we eat seasoned food twice on this night, why do we eat roast

only instead of boiled stewed or roast meat?' Certainly this is the arrangement that is found in the Gemara, the second half of the Talmud which is a commentary on the Mishnah,² that the meal was served but not eaten, but one wonders if Jeremias is correct in understanding the Mishnaic order in this way. Rather one ought to think of the questions being put *during* the course of the meal, as an expression of amazement at the unusual dishes. This as we shall see later, accords better with the accounts of the Last Supper and Jesus' own interpretations of the bread and wine.

In answer to these questions of the youngest son, the father is required to expound the history of Israel 'beginning with the disgrace and ending with the glory'. According to Gamaliel, this expounding had to include reference to three things, and not to do so was to fail in one's duty; these three are Passover (God passed over the houses in Egypt), unleavened bread (because they were redeemed from Egypt – presumably so quickly that there was no time for the bread to leaven), and bitter herbs (because the Egyptians embittered their lives).

The question arises whether this was Gamaliel the first or the second; on the basis that Gamaliel 2nd was the one who arranged the ritual for the daily service, since the destruction of the temple made it necessary to find new methods of worship, one could say that it was he. However, the mention of the Passover would suggest an earlier date and therefore in all likelihood it is probably a reference to Gamaliel 1st, which would bring us right into the New Testament era. Yet the mere fact that he stressed that this was one's duty proves that such interpretation was already in existence.

The order of service continues, each man is to regard himself as if he personally had come out of Egypt and thus 'it is our bounden duty to give thanks, to praise, to glorify, to honour, to exalt, to extol and to bless him who wrought all these wonders for our fathers and for us'. There follows the first part of the Hallel (Ps. 113-18) ending either at Ps. 113 or 114 depending on whether one followed the school of Shammai or Hillel, and this concluded with the 'Ge'ullah', a benediction recounting God's redemption of his people out of Egypt. R. Tarfon adds a concluding prayer of his own without the benediction as does R. Akiba, and Akiba's is eschatological in character 'therefore bring us in peace to the other festivals that are coming to meet us'. The second cup (the haggadah cup) is now drunk and according to the rite as given in the Gemara and in its present form to this day, the main meal begins, although as we have seen in the Mishnah the meal was already in progress.

The meal as such is concluded with grace over the third cup (the cup of blessing) – 10:7, and then finally the second half of the Hallel is sung and the fourth cup is drunk (the Hallel cup, the cup of praise).

In the Mishnaic account there follows a warning against letting the solemn joy of the Passover meal degenerate into a convivial gathering, cf. I Cor. 11:20 ff. The Hebrew 'epikoman' was later misunderstood for the Greek 'epikomion', dessert, and that this was an injunction not to omit dessert after the meal – already in the Talmud Pes. 120a there is some confusion. Thus in the service to this day, the remainder of the mazzoth is distributed after the meal as 'afikoman', dessert.

This then, is the Seder as we have it in the Mishnah, and to this we must link the Supper in the New Testament. Admittedly the order as we find it in the Mishnah is of the second century A.D. and therefore that much later than the New Testament, but especially in liturgical circles tradition lives on and is not quick to change, and thus we can with some degree of certainty take it as a pointer to the Seder in the time of Jesus – perhaps more so with this tractate than with others, precisely because it is a liturgical one.

2

There is a correspondence between the Seder and the Supper at several points – the idea is to see how the accounts as we have them in the gospels fit into the Seder context.

(a) The meal took place at night, according to all the gospel records, and this was unusual – the normal time for a meal was the late afternoon and this was also the time of the meal at Qumran (Josephus Wars 2:130 ff.). The fact that it was at night agrees with the Mishnah at two points, 10:1 that on the eve of Passover a man must eat nothing from the time of the evening offering until night-fall, and 10:8 that there were certain rules pertaining to cases where people fell asleep.

(b) Though reclining is not mentioned in the Mishnah tractate, it came to be enjoined on all who took part in the Seder. The origins of why this should be are obscure, and the Samaritans in their Passover to this day stand and eat the meal in the greatest haste. Perhaps it is taken as a symbol of freedom and that they have now come out of slavery, or simply that a Roman custom has crept in and become part of the service. At any rate, reclining was enjoined, and this is what we find mentioned in the gospel accounts – Mark 14:18 and parallels, John 13:12.

(c) The meal apparently was in progress before bread was broken, i.e. it was preceded by a preliminary course, whereas normally a meal began with the breaking of bread. The evidence in the New Testament is Mark 14:18-21, Matt. 26:21-5, which presuppose that the meal had begun, even though with Jeremias one may take 'as they were eating' as a redaction. This corresponds to the Seder in

Pes. 10:3 'when food is brought before him he eats it seasoned with lettuce until he is come to the breaking of bread', that is, there was a preliminary dish of green vegetables before the main meal.

(d) We have already noted that contrary to Jeremias and subsequent tradition, the questions and explanations of the various elements probably took place during the meal itself, and this would accord well with the account as we find it in Mark 14:22-4, that Jesus explained the symbols as they were partaking of them, 'he broke it and gave it to them, and said' etc. Jesus' own words of interpretation (the exact form and meaning of which we need not go into here) would quite naturally fit into the context of the Passover, where the interpretation of the elements was an established part of the Seder, 10:4-5, but where the interpretation itself was not fixed.³ The point at which he did so would seem to have been after the grace said over the bread at the start of the main meal, and after the grace said over the third cup at the end of the meal and before the Hallel. This receives support from the Pauline 'after supper' and the mention of the cup of blessing, a technical term for the third cup over which the grace after the meal was said, the 'kos shel berakha', Pes. 10:7.

It may be of interest in passing to notice a manuscript variant at Pes. 10:4 which makes reference to a two-fold dipping 'on other nights we dip but once, but this night twice' in the context of the questions put by the youngest son. (The present service has the form 'on all other nights we do not dip our herbs even once; on this night why do we dip them twice?' – presumably because dipping ceased to be a normal practice of any meal.) If one compares this with Matt. 26:23, the reference to the dipping as a sign of betrayal would seem to be the first one, i.e. during the preliminary course; v.21 presupposes that the meal had begun but that they had not yet come to the main course v.26, and so also Mark 14:18. Thus the prophecy of Judas' betrayal is in the context of the first course.

(e) The use of wine in the Supper is an unobtrusive but important element, and moreover red wine (thus from its being likened to blood) which was enjoined by R. Judah (c. A.D. 150) who according to Jeremias (page 53) was consistently a representative of older tradition. Wine was something not commonly used and was reserved for special occasions – Pes. 10:1 urges the importance of having enough wine to fill four cups, everyone must partake of the four cups. The drinking of wine is first mentioned in Jubilees 49:6-9,⁴ and it became obligatory at Passover.

(f) The element of eschatology and remembrance is present in the Seder and also in the Supper. The eschatological is present in the prayer of R. Akiba, 10:6, and that of remembrance is linked to specific things – thus the Passover and bread and herbs recall

certain things and 'proclaim them forth' not simply as the remembering of things long past but that the past should become present in a real way – 'in every generation a man must so regard himself as if he came forth himself out of Egypt'. The 'this do in remembrance of me' and the 'for as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup you proclaim the Lord's death until he come' are quite in keeping with the Passover Seder. According to W. D. Davies,⁵ the command to repeat comes from Paul who borrowed it from the Seder service, but more likely it is pre-Paul and something which he found. Whether or not it is presupposed by Jesus is hard to say, although that would be one way of tracing the link between Last Supper and Lord's Supper.

(g) The Hallel, as we saw, was divided into two parts, and the second part followed the main meal and the third cup – this is undoubtedly the hymn sung by Jesus and the disciples (Mark 14:26, Matt. 26:30). It was sometimes called the 'himnon', a loan word from the Greek. According to the gospel accounts, they did not drink a fourth cup, although obligatory according to Pes. 10:1. Dalman suggests that the fourth cup was a cup of joy and that they would not be feeling particularly joyful, Jeremias that Jesus fasted the whole time and that they stopped at the Hallel. Perhaps it may be simply that at this time four cups had not become mandatory, and therefore the Seder ended with the Hallel.⁶

In conclusion to this section, we may add a word about the Passover Lamb, or rather about its absence. That it is not mentioned, unless perhaps at Luke 22:15, is not particularly damaging. Dalman argues that it would have been odd for Jesus to liken himself to the lamb on the table, but be that as it may (and it is obvious anyway that Jesus did not), Jeremias seems on strong ground when he says that the accounts in the gospels have been influenced liturgically, and that therefore mention of the lamb which would have been part of the meal would now no longer be necessary. Moreover in Pes. 10:3 the lamb is given only a brief mention in passing for the Seder account here reflects a time after the destruction of the Temple. To this we may add one other consideration – the fact that the lamb is not mentioned in the gospel accounts, save the Lukan reference, might even count as proof that the Supper was a Passover meal, for if it were not so originally but was edited to be so, surely the editor who obviously knew a great deal about the Seder would not have omitted so basic a thing as the Passover lamb.

Although the main topic of this essay is the correspondence between the Seder and the Supper, there are one or two parts in the New

Testament outside the Supper context where scholars have detected some relation to the Haggadah, or where there seems to be some influence. Three have been selected for a brief consideration, John 6, I Cor. 5 and 10, and I Pet.

(a) In John 6⁷ some have found a formal parallel to Pes. 10:4, where the questions of the youngest child are called forth by significant acts, i.e. he wants to know what is going on with all these unusual things happening and to these questions the father replies. The whole thing is arranged so to speak, with the questions providing an opportunity for the teaching which follows. Yet this device is so much a part of John's style and often of Rabbinic argument generally that to argue from this to a use of the Seder would seem to be quite unconvincing, despite the chapter's context (be it theological or historical) that 'it was about the time of Passover'. Some, too, have pressed further in this matter, detecting the influence of the baraita on the Four Sons, which came to have a place in the Haggadah; a baraita is a section which is not found in the Mishnah but which contains tradition of a very old kind. This baraita comprises questions put by four sons, derived from the Old Testament where in four places questions of sons are mentioned in connection with the Passover, Deut. 6:20, Exod. 12:26, 13:14 and 13:8. These are taken as four different kinds of question asked by four different sons; they are 'halakha' (legal application), 'haggadah' (apparent contradiction in the Law), 'boruth' (mocking) and 'derek erez' (application to life). Applying this pattern to John 6 where there are four questions, v. 28 is held to be halakha, v. 30 'haggadah', v. 42 is 'boruth' and v. 52 'derek erez' (or else it is an ignorant question which sometimes replaced this – the 'tam' of the original in the Talmud becomes 'tippesh'). Again one finds oneself unconvinced and the argument seems somewhat over-ingenious; moreover, this whole attempt to find Seder themes in John 6 involves one in the complex question of traditional material embedded in that gospel and whether John reflects the Synoptic version of the Supper.

(b) In I Cor. 5:7-8 one finds a midrash, the embellishing of a story to make it more real and to draw out its importance. It is a common feature of the Seder service, indeed it is stated at one point that the more one can embellish a tale the more praiseworthy one is. This tendency was not absent from Christian circles, and in this midrash we find an interpretation of the lamb and the bread. Moreover, in the somewhat abrupt way in which it is introduced with Jesus as the Passover lamb (only here in Paul) and in the distinctly Semitic vocabulary, one suspects that it is pre-Paul. Moreover, in the comparison of Jesus with the lamb Paul presupposes that his readers know what he is talking about (cf. I Pet. 1:39, Rev. 5:6, 9, John 1:29, 36). Here the keeping of the feast does not refer to the Euch-

arist as the counterpart of the Passover, but the Christian's whole life is seen as the festival which must be celebrated by purity of conduct. It bears witness also to the early nature of the practice of the removal of the leaven which precedes the Seder service and which was part of the keeping of the Passover.

At 10:1ff. we find another analogy based on the wilderness wanderings of the Jews, and this part of the Exodus story played a part in the Seder service. Much was made of the pillar and the cloud, the manna and the water from the rock, and perhaps there may have been something of the Seder in Paul's mind at this point, beyond his frequent use of the Old Testament to argue or press home a point. Thus, he mentions the Supper in passing in v. 15, and though a passing reference it might indicate what was in his mind, again the midrash of c. 5 was aimed at the living of a life worthy of the paschal lamb which meant purging out the leaven of the old life, and there is here a warning against wrong incorporation so that communion in Christ ought to mean right living. Unlike the midrash of c. 5, this seems to be Paul's own thinking at this point, but one would not be altogether surprised if something of the Passover haggadah was in his mind.

(c) Recently,⁸ some attempt has been made to trace the influence of the Seder on I Peter, mainly by way of supporting a theory of F. Cross that the letter is really in part the celebrant's part in an Easter Pasch. Thus the reference to Jesus as the lamb in 1:19, the themes of slavery and pilgrimage in the letter and the use of certain phrases and Old Testament texts together point to a dependence on the Passover Haggadah. Yet one finds this quite unconvincing, and if one does not accept Cross' theory concerning the letter, then it remains that much more unconvincing. Even if 1:19 is a reference to Christ as the Paschal lamb, one need look no further than the writer's making use of traditional material, as indeed he does throughout the letter, and certainly the themes of slavery and pilgrimage are common enough in the epistles generally without recourse to the Passover haggadah to explain them.⁹

4

Finally, it seemed worth while to take a brief look at the 'breaking of bread' as it is in Acts and its relation to the Lord's Supper. This is a much debated area of study, as is the whole nature and structure of early church worship generally, and the evidence is capable of different interpretations. One common view that there were two kinds of meal goes back to Lietzmann. In his book 'Mass and Lord's Supper', he argues that there was a fellowship meal, and a meal which was linked to the death of Christ; the latter came from Paul

and the former from the table fellowship of Jesus and his disciples. Paul it was who sought to tone down the enthusiasm of the Resurrection dawn by linking the meal to the death of Jesus with the aid of Hellenistic mysticism. The weakness here, however, is that Paul is not tempering rowdiness with new teaching on the significance of the meal, but is restating what they already knew and what had been told to him.¹⁰ On the other hand it seems difficult to maintain that every reference to the breaking of bread in Acts is a reference to the Lord's Supper or Eucharist. Jeremias' exegesis of the Acts 2:42 summary is not convincing that the 'koinonia' means the table fellowship, followed by the breaking of bread as a reference to the Eucharist.

On the whole, one is content to adopt a kind of intermediate position, whereby the Lord's Supper may have in some sense existed loosely alongside the fellowship meal, sometimes being linked to it and sometimes not, or else grew out of the fellowship meal context as traditions about Jesus were gradually collected – perhaps the Emmaus story in Luke and the accounts generally of the table fellowship of the risen Christ with the disciples should be studied further in this regard. It is interesting to note that in Paul's day the Eucharist is still part of a proper meal, although a gradual separation of the Eucharist and Agape is also apparent in that to combat unseemly conduct Paul advises some to remain at home and satisfy their hunger before coming, I Cor. 11:34, cf. v. 22. By the time of the Didache, which often seems to preserve an earlier pre-Gentile orientated Christianity and which incidentally knows nothing of the connection of the Supper with the death of Jesus, they were definitely separated, 'after you have been satisfied with food'.

Whether there were originally two meals in the early church or differing forms of the same meal or the one grew from the other, it ought to be remembered that for the Jew every meal had a sacred and significant character and we may surmise that Christ would be remembered at any meal amongst Christians, not indeed as a person of the past, but as the risen and victorious Lord. Here ultimately lies the reason why the Passover Seder, something celebrated once a year, came in its Christian form to be celebrated once a week, that a new Passover and Exodus had indeed taken place and that in the mystery of the Resurrection, and through the gift of the holy Spirit, Christ was alive and continually present.

NOTES

1. The Mishnah, ed. H. Danby, p. 136ff. and esp. p. 150, sect. 10.
2. This is also the arrangement in the Seder service to this day that the meal is served but not eaten until after the questions have been asked and the answers given.

3. See Jeremias, p. 57.
4. See R. H. Charles, *The Pseudepigrapha* ad. loc.
5. *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism*, p. 251.
6. According to D. Daube, *The New Testament and Rabbinic Judaism*, p. 330, the fourth cup was postponed to be drunk in the New Age; drinking of wine was permissible between other cups but not between the third and the fourth cups. *Pes.* 10:7.
7. See Daube, op. cit., chapters 8-9. B. Gaertner, 'Passover and John 6', and also L. Finkelstein, 'The Oldest Midrash', *Harvard Theol. Rev.*, 31, p. 291ff., 'Pre-Maccabean Documents in the Passover Haggadah', *ibid.* 35, p. 291ff; 36, p. 1ff.
8. A. Leaney in *N.T. Studies* 10 (1963-4) p. 238ff., '1 Peter and the Passover - an Interpretation'.
9. 1 Peter's use of *Ps.* 118 need not mean that there is dependence on the Hallel at that point; at 2:9 the writer looks beyond the Exodus theme to Sinai, something which is not found in the early tradition of the Haggadah, nor does the Haggadah make use of *Exod.* 19:5 - 1 *Pet.* 2:9. Again, the phrase 'the vain traditions of your fathers', 1:18, is not a reference to the Haggadah and its exposition of *Josh.* 24:2ff., but merely reflects an idea common in Judaism and in the N.T. itself, that pagans lived in ignorance and futility.
10. The 'apo tou Kuriou' is best understood not as a reference by Paul to a heavenly vision, as Lietzmann thought, nor yet as a reference to the historical Jesus, but Paul's confirmation of his right as a true apostle to impart authentic tradition in an authoritative manner. At any rate, the tradition did not originate with himself, though one suspects that its milieu was the Gentile church.

See also - *Jewish Encyclopaedia*, 'Haggadah'; H. Schauss, *The Jewish Festivals*, G. F. Moore, *Judaism*, J. Segal, *Passover from the earliest times to A.D. 70*; T. Gaster, *Passover, its history and traditions*.

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VISITORS' HYMNARIES

Many otherwise well-kept churches suffer from disfiguring copies of hymnaries or bibles lying around the pews with their spines broken or with the edges tattered. Some of these may be 'old friends' of members who might be encouraged by a timely word to show their love and respect by keeping their treasures in good repair.

Too often one finds that such books are the property of the congregation supplied for the use of visitors. The remedy for this must lie with congregational officials. Surely it comes near an insult (not confined to Scotland) to provide a visitor either at the door or in the pew with a backless book or with one from which vital pages are missing or are liable to fall out when the book is opened.