THE BEARING OF OLD TESTAMENT TERMINOLOGY ON THE JOHANNINE CHRONOLOGY OF THE FINAL PASSOVER OF JESUS

by

CULLEN I. K. STORY
Princeton Theological Seminary

The first of the appointed feasts of the Jews is denoted—at times—as “the feast of unleavened bread,” one of the three feasts at which attendance of all Jewish males was required (Exod. 23:14-17; Dt. 16:16f.). At other times, the feast is named “the passover” (2 Chron. 30:1, 5), while some texts use both terms (e.g. Lev. 23:4-8). Its celebration during the reign of Josiah, as related by the Chronicler, captures our interest since, with the exception of one verse only, i.e. 2 Chron. 35:17, the feast is described throughout as “the passover” (2 Chron. 35:1, 6, 7, 9, 11, 13, 16, 18-19). Immediately after v. 17 where both descriptions are found, i.e. “the passover” and “the feast of unleavened bread,” in vs. 18-19 the one term used is “passover” referring comprehensively to the seven-day feast. “No passover like it had been kept in Israel since the days of Samuel the prophet...” (v. 18). In like fashion, Josephus claims that the feast of unleavened bread is called “passover” (e.g. Antiq. 14.21, War 2.10), and the Mishnah, similarly, affirms the Passover to be seven days in duration.—“At the Passover of Egypt, the lamb ... was eaten in haste and during one night; whereas the Passover of the generations [that followed after] continued throughout seven days.”1 Essentially, the Chronicler, Josephus, and the Mishnah, have a bearing on the terminology of the Fourth Gospel where the term “passover”—not “the feast of unleavened bread”—is alone used with reference to the feast.2

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1 Mishnah, Pes. 9.5 (transl. H. Danby).
2 In the Synoptics, both terms are used (cf. Mt. 26:17; Mk. 14:12; Luke 22:7-8).
The following terms appear in John:

"the Passover" (11:55; 12:1; 18:28, 39; 19:14),
"the Passover feast" (2:23),
"the feast of the Passover" (13:1),
"the Passover, the feast of the Jews" (6:4),
"the Passover of the Jews" (2:13; 11:55), and
"the feast" (4:452; 11:56; 12:12, 20; 13:29).

The descriptions vary in meaning. The frequent temporal expressions, e.g. "before the Passover" (12:1, cf. 13:1), "the Passover was near" (11:55, cf. 2:13; 6:4), and "during (at) the Passover" suggest that—similar to the Old Testament accounts—the term "Passover" may embrace the entire feast of seven days. In a few texts, however, John turns our attention to the paschal meal at the beginning of the feast (13:1-2, 29). Inner connections between John and the Synoptics indicate that the supper (διεσπόρων) of John 13:2 is none other than the passover meal climaxed by the institution of the holy eucharist (cf. διεσπόρων in 1 Cor. 11:20). The presence of Judas, Jesus' prediction of his betrayal, Judas' departure from the table (implicit in the Synoptics, explicit in John), the affirmation by Peter of unswerving loyalty to Jesus, and Jesus' prediction of his denial—all of these circumstances together form solid lines of connection between the meal in John 13 and the Synoptic account of the holy supper. Moreover, a rhetorical saying of Jesus in Luke's account contains a subtle link with the foot-washing of John 13—"For which is the greater, one who sits at table, or one who serves? Is it not the one who sits at table? But I am among you as one who serves" (RSV, Luke 22:27). And he "served" them that night by washing their feet.

The passover meant that his hour had come (13:1). It is not described in John as "the hour" for eating the passover lamb as Luke expresses it (Luke 22:14-15). Uniquely, it is Jesus' hour, says John, because he is the real passover lamb (John 1:29, cf. 1 Cor. 5:7). The absence of the Greek article with "supper" (John 13:2) and the fact that there is no "institution" of the supper in John suggest that John is not concerned first of all with the passover celebration nor with the eucharist. Since he has already given the deep significance of the holy eucharist (cf. 6:54-58), the meal in John 13 fulfills another purpose that is to be seen in Jesus' subsequent action (13:4ff.).

Now, however, if the supper of John 13:2 is none other than the