

II

WAS THE LAST SUPPER A PASSOVER MEAL?¹

ALL FOUR GOSPELS agree that the day of Jesus' death was a Friday (Mark 15.42; Matt. 27.62; Luke 23.54; John 19.31, 42). Since at the time of Jesus the day was reckoned from sunset to sunset,² *this Friday* (from 6 p.m. on Maundy Thursday to

¹ [German '*Passamahl*'. Transl.] The *spelling* 'Passah' with final 'h' is wrong because it is derived from the Hebrew *pesah* whereas 'Passa' is an Aramaic *status emphaticus*.

With regard to the *pronunciation* of the word the following points can be established: (1) In Palestinian Aramaic at the time of Jesus the consonant *p* (except in the case of some foreign loan words) was uniformly pronounced as an aspirate, 'ph', even at the beginning of a syllable (G. Dalman, *Grammatik des jüdisch-palästinischen Aramäisch*², Leipzig, 1905 [= *Grammatik*], 67f.; W. Gesenius-E. Kautzsch - G. Bergsträsser, *Hebräische Grammatik* I²⁰, Leipzig, 1918, 39f.; H. Laible, 'Die drei Sprachen Jesu' [I], *ThLBl* 44 [1923], cols. 115f.). We know this especially because of the way in which *p* is regularly represented by *φ* 'ph' in the second column of the Hexapla (P. E. Kahle, *The Cairo Geniza*², Oxford, 1959, 180), from the explicit testimony of Jerome (C. Siegfried, 'Die Aussprache des Hebräischen bei Hieronymus', *ZAW* 4 [1884], 63f.), and by the way in which *p* is pronounced as 'f' among the Samaritans (F. Diening, *Das Hebräische bei den Samaritanern* [Bonner Orientalistische Studien 24], Stuttgart, 1938, 15). Corresponding to this, the Hebrew *pesah* is uniformly transcribed in the Greek texts with an initial aspirate (*φ*): *φασέκ*/*φασέχ* (LXX eighteen times in II Chron. 30, 35; Jer. 38[31]. 8; Philo, *Leg. all.* 3.94; Aq. Josh. 5.10; Sy. Ex. 12.11, 27; Num. 9.2; Josh. 5.10) or *φασέ* (Aq. Deut. 16.1) or *phase* (Vulg.). (2) Surprisingly, in the case of the Aramaic *pasha* we find a difference in that the Greek representation of this varies between a usual *πάσχα* (LXX, Philo, NT, Josephus, Aquila, Symmachus, Theodotion) and an occasional *φάσχα* (Josephus, *Ant.* 5.20; 9.271; 14.21 v. l.; 17.213; *Bell.* 2.10 v. l.). The pronunciation of *pasha* with an initial 'p' is not an irregularity due to the influence of the Greek *πάσχειν* 'to suffer' (so Dalman, *Grammatik*, 138), but rather the common Greek dissimilation from *φ-χ* to *π-χ* which is attested elsewhere (Blass-Debrunner, § 39.2). (3) The vocalization with 'i' (*pisha*) in Targum Onkelos, Jerusalem Talmud and Midrash is late, witness the concurrence of LXX, Philo, NT and Josephus (Laible, *ThLBl* 45, 115f.); this transition from *a* to *i* in a closed syllable can be observed in all dialects of Palestinian Aramaic.

The correct pronunciation of the word is therefore *phasha*.

² In all that follows it is to be noted that among the Jews at the time of Jesus it

6 p.m. on Good Friday) includes the whole of the Passion in its narrower sense: the Last Supper, Gethsemane, arrest and trial, crucifixion and burial (Mark 14.17-15.47; Matt. 26.20-27.61; Luke 22.14-23.56a; John 13.2-19.42); all the four evangelists agree also on this point.

In view of this agreement, it is all the more surprising that the evangelists apparently differ from one another in a further question, in the question as to *whether this Friday was the first day of the passover festival*, i.e. as to whether or not the Last Supper was a passover meal. The solution of this problem is not only important for the chronology of the life of Jesus, but still more—and here lies the interest theology and the Church have in the question—for the understanding of the eucharistic words of Jesus and for an appreciation of the *heilsgeschichtliche* connections in which the Eucharist stands.¹

THE PROBLEM

The *synoptic evangelists* hold the view that the Last Supper was a passover meal,² and therefore took place in the night of Nisan 14/15.³

was the uniform practice to have the day begin at sunset—more exactly: with the first appearance of the stars after sunset (b. Ber. 2a, b Bar.). Instructive in this respect is the determining of the boundary between the days in the tradition of the Samaritans. It lay midway between the sun's becoming golden before its setting and the disappearance of the evening red after sunset. So Finhas ibn Ishak, *Kitab el-hulf ben es-samira wel-yahud* (c. 1885), manuscript in my possession, 85 (cf. G. Dalman, 'Das samaritanische Passah im Verhältnis zum jüdischen', *Palästina-jahrbuch* 8 [1913, correctly 1912], 123; J. Jeremias, *Die Passahfeier der Samaritaner* [BZAW 59], Giessen, 1932 [= *Passahfeier*], 80). Finhas adds that the end of the day is therefore some two minutes after sunset.

The fact that in late Judaism the day was reckoned from the evening is shown most clearly in that the Sabbath was 'sanctified' after sunset, and twenty-four hours later at sunset was 'dismissed' (see below, p. 26).

¹ S. Schöffel, 'Offenbarung Gottes im hl. Abendmahl', *Luthertum* 48 (1937), 340-6, 353-72; 49 (1938), 33-54; M. Barth, *Das Abendmahl. Passamahl, Bundesmahl und Messiasmahl* (ThSt 18), Zollikon-Zürich, 1945 [= *Abendmahl*].

² Mark 14.12, 14, 16 (par. Matt. 26.17, 18, 19; Luke 22.7, 8, 11, 13); Luke 22.15; also Gospel of the Ebionites in Epiphanius, *Haer.* 30.22.4 (K. Holl, *Epiphanius I* [GCS 25], Leipzig, 1915, 363.4-6).

³ Again and again we find dilettantes maintaining that at the time of Jesus the passover meal was eaten in the night of Nisan 13/14 (e.g. G. Amadon, 'Ancient Jewish Calendation', *JBL* 61 [1942], 245; 'The Johannine Synoptic Argument', *ATR* 26 [1944], 110f.; 'Important Passover Texts in Josephus and Philo', *ATR* 27 [1945], 115); it is even maintained that this is still today the practice of the Samaritans. All this is fable, cf. Jeremias, *Passahfeier*, 78.