Pesach – The Passover

At sundown of Wednesday (April 21, 2027) the Jewish festival of Passover begins.

The Jewish Passover is an ancient celebration, probably three thousand years old. Passover remembers a decisive event that is interpreted in terms of God's intervention in the history of God's people. The Passover from Mitzrayim [biblical Egypt] is remembered metaphorically as Israel's **creation story** and is embedded in Israel's self-understanding.

The redemption from Mitzrayim is a foundational event in the story of Israel; it is remembered in the weekly Sabbath celebration, in the daily recitation of the Shema, and as the watershed of Israel's salvation history. All subsequent events in the story of Israel are interpreted in relation to this single event.

THE PASSOVER IN TEMPLE TIMES

The tractate, Pesachim, which is included in the *Mishnah* (compiled c. 220 CE) preserves for us the ancient order of the Passover Seder. This ritual is still the pattern for today's Passover Seder.

- The eating of a communal home based meal with symbolic foods.
- The ritual QUESTIONS that invite the telling of the story.
- The annual RE-TELLING of the Exodus story.

According to Rabbi Gamaliel (Pesachim 10.5) three things must be included in the re-telling—to neglect these elements would be to fail in one's duty...

PASSOVER, UNLEAVENED BREAD, AND BITTER HERBS

In the Passover Haggadah I really have the experience that I am there; I am part of the story.

THE CONTEMPORARY PASSOVER

The annual Passover festival has always been of powerful significance in Israel's story—a story that is rooted in the emergence of Israel from the mists of time.

A good story has certain essential elements:

- We must become involved in it.
- It must speak to our conscious or subconscious.
- It must be meaningful.

The Jewish Passover has always been understood as both the story of the 1st redemption, and as a contemporary experience of God's saving presence. Told over a cup of wine, the cup absorbs the story. *Matzah* (unleavened bread) also is a part of that story. From this perspective, when Jesus said, "This is my body …blood" he really meant it. This *was* his story, *his* life, *his* blood.

We are reminded in Holy Week that Christians must to careful to fully respect the ever present reality and purpose of the Passover for the Jewish people, "the people of God of the Old Covenant, never revoked by God" (Pope John Paul 11, 1980).

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