

Remember, Restore, Renew

September 7 • 2008

Focus Scripture

Exodus 12:1–14

Additional Scriptures

Psalm 149

Romans 13:8–14

Matthew 18:15–20

God of grace and justice, your presence fed and freed the Hebrews, and your faithfulness fulfilled the promise of people and land. Be with us today to nourish and sustain our spirit and humanity for Christ's sake. Amen.

Community is formed in ritual, learning, service, and worship. The Hebrew people received God's grace and compassion in the gift of the Passover and in remembering this experience of liberation. Today, Jesus' disciples continue to remember and celebrate God's saving works in loving, disciplined, worshipping communities.

Focus Scripture: Exodus 12:1–14

Today's story follows after God's action to achieve the Hebrews' release from Egypt through Moses' repeated pleas to Pharaoh for liberty. The stories in Exodus imagine a test of the gods. In the ancient world, a diverse group of gods were thought responsible for the fate of humans. The Passover story recalls and celebrates God's identity as the one, true God who acts to save.

On this first Passover, the enslaved Hebrew community prepared for an epic journey. It was to be a political journey, from slavery to freedom. It also was to be a journey toward community culture and identity. At the beginning of the journey, the Hebrews were a diverse people. After receiving God's law at Sinai (Exodus 19–20), they became God's covenant people. By the end of the journey recounted in Exodus, the Hebrews were established as Israelites.

Subsequent generations remembered Passover through worship. The account in Exodus 12 was likely recorded and shaped during the Israelites' later exile in Babylon (587–536 BCE). It reflects how Israelite priests regulated worship through ordinances (v. 14). The ways to select and prepare the lamb, and dispose unusable parts, are detailed. Directions about cooking the meat and making sure everyone participates are very particular. Instructions about using the blood are specific. These instructions helped to maintain the form of the annual Passover worship and ritual. In telling the Passover story each year, Israelites remembered their identity. Ritual and worship worked together to renew and restore the people.

Blood painted onto the frames of the house doorways was a sign of hope for a restored relationship with God. Blood did not save. When God saw this sign, the tenth plague passed over that household. God's liberating justice revealed who God was. God

saved. The deaths of Egyptians were due to Pharaoh's persistent injustice. God did not require life to be taken in order to give life.

God's creating and saving acts meet in this story. Israelite time and all remembrance festivals begin from this first Passover (vv. 2, 14). This sense of "beginning again" recalls creation. Also, people often recognize cataclysms – such as devastating earthquakes, storms, or acts of war – as times of new beginnings. Immediately after the Passover meal and final plague, God leads the Hebrews out of Egypt toward new life in the Promised Land. Passover is associated with deliverance. God keeps God's promise to save and restore.

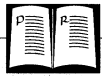
In the Passover, the community of Hebrews experienced God's restoration and renewed relationship. In **Psalm 149**, the psalmist remembers such mercy, and expresses praise for being God's people.

Paul, in **Romans 13:8–14**, reminds readers of what it means to live as God's people. Relationships with one another and with those outside the community are to be guided by Jesus' interpretation of God's law.

In Jesus' time, God's presence was closely linked with well-disciplined communities. In **Matthew 18:15–20**, Jesus teaches that God's forgiveness is never limited. God always seeks "lost ones" with compassion. When Christian communities live by Jesus' words, God's glory shines through.



God's deliverance restored and renewed the Hebrew people; later they remembered this gift in Passover worship. In what ways does your community proclaim what God has done in your lives? What rituals help your church remember and celebrate God's promise and purpose?



Replacement biblical background page for **Lutheran, Episcopal, and Anglican** congregations using the **paired reading** stream of the Revised Common Lectionary is on the Congregational Life Paired Reading CD.

If you have Internet access, visit www.spiritseasons.com to access *Spirit Sightings* for connections between current events and the focus passage.

