

| Key words | Key concepts |
|------------|---|
| Exodus | <p>Pesach is one of the most popular and celebrated Jewish festivals, even amongst non-observant Jews. It is through the rituals of this festival that Jews can continue to experience the sensations and emotions of making the journey from slavery to freedom. The theme of spiritual redemption is also paramount as demonstrated by the idea that each generation of Jews is obliged to immerse themselves in the Exodus experience. It also looks forward to the redemption of the world under the rule of God with references to the Messiah and the prophet Elijah, whom it is believed will announce the arrival of the Messiah.</p> <p>Exodus 12-15 provides the historical background to the festival, telling of the escape from slavery in Egypt following the last of the ten plagues which God sent upon Egypt. The final plague was the worst with the firstborn of every Egyptian family being killed. The Israelites were instructed to smear the blood of a lamb over their doorposts so that the angel of death would pass over, thus sparing their children from destruction. The Israelites escaped by crossing the Red Sea which God had parted for them. The Egyptians followed, but the waters crashed down and they were killed.</p> <p>The seder meal is a symbolic re-enactment which follows a set order during which Jews recall the slavery and Exodus from Egypt. The order is set down in the Haggadah, and at set times everyone at the table eats the symbolic foods that are set out on the seder plate and drinks four glasses of wine. The youngest child of the family asks four questions with the head of the family giving the answers whilst pointing out the various symbols that are displayed on the Seder plate. The symbols are as follows:</p> <p>Matzah: no time to wait for bread to rise</p> <p>Shank bone of lamb: lamb sacrifice in order to smear blood on doorposts</p> <p>Maror: the bitter times of slavery</p> <p>Charoset: the mortar used by the slaves and the sweetness of redemption</p> <p>Karpas: usually parsley, which is dipped into saltwater symbolising the sweat and tears of slavery</p> <p>A roasted egg (not eaten): recalling the sacrifice that would have been made in the ancient temple in Jerusalem</p> <p>Four glasses of wine: the fourfold promise of redemption.</p> |
| Pesach | |
| Redemption | |
| Seder | |
| Haggadah | |
| Matzah | |
| Maror | |
| Charoset | |
| Karpas | |

| Key quotes |
|--|
| ‘Each generation of participants is encouraged to regard itself as standing on the edge of redemption, emphasising the important links between the sense of history and contemporary identity with the Jewish people.’ (Wright) |
| ‘He who does not stress these rituals on Passover does not fulfil his obligations: the paschal lamb, matzah, and maror.’ (Gamaliel) |
| ‘Passover’s ability to accommodate historical and theological change within the structured framework of its rituals means that in many ways it epitomises Judaism. The existence of unity alongside diversity, tradition without stagnation is vital to Jewish expression.’ (Wright) |
| ‘Therefore, say to the Israelites: “I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. I will free you from being slaves to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment.”’ (Exodus 6:6) |

| Issues for analysis and evaluation |
|---|
| <p>Key questions, arguments and debates</p> <p>To what extent is Pesach the central festival within Judaism?</p> <p>Those who would agree might do so on the basis of its link to the Mosaic covenant and its indication, and exploration, of the relationship between God and human beings within this covenant. Its popularity even amongst non-observant Jews might add weight to its centrality. The festival continues to have relevance for the present as well as the future. But what about other festivals? Do they have equal claims?</p> <p>Does the notion of redemption have any relevance for Judaism today?</p> <p>It continues to be an important theme within Jewish ritual and is at the heart of the festival of Pesach. It is a theme which is evident in all Jewish denominations, but in different ways. Does the fact that each denomination places a different emphasis upon it dilute its importance?</p> |