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Passover Feature

IN HONOR OF PASSOVER, WHICH COMMEMORATES THE ANNIVERSARY OF THE LIBERATION OF THE ISRAELITES FROM EGYPTIAN BONDAGE, THE LAS VEGAS ISRAELITE WILL PUBLISH A SERIES OF FEATURES. THIS YEAR THE PASSOVER FESTIVAL IS INAUGURATED AT SUN-DOWN ON THE EVENING OF WEDNESDAY, APRIL 2, AND ENDS ON THURSDAY, APRIL 10.

Passover, Purim, History

By ARTHUR MARKOWITZ

Purim, and Passover, two seemingly dissimilar holidays, brushed paths in the dim pages of antiquity. And when they did, the meeting only showed that both holidays do have a common thread -- the deliverance of Jews from oppression and the strengthening of their religious beliefs.

When the Jews returned to the land of Judaea after the Babylonian exile and rebuilt the Temple, the first Holy Day they marked after consecrating the new House of God was Passover. The Book of Ezra details the ceremony in the new Temple as the returning Jews with renewed vigor marked Passover their original deliverance from a foreign land and when their forefathers, a motley group of sojourners became a People.

But all did not go well with the returned Jews and the rebuilt Temple. Internal dissension, a low state of religious observance and war like threats from other nations still occupying large parts of Judaea all created problems. In the end meaningful leadership for the Judeans came from the land of their exile in the East, from such men as Ezra and Nehemiah.

The various kings that ruled in the East, now part of the Persian Empire, supported the Jews in their religious endeavors. This support included ordering the return of Temple items and the requirement that Jews in Egypt to celebrate the Passover.

In the East, the Jews that remained faced little difficulty for the most part. There is one known major exception. The Jews of Shushan in the days of Queen Esther and King Ahasuerus.

Who was King Ahasuerus? Biblical commentators have advanced a number of different Persian kings. Whoever he was, antiquity indicated he supported the Jews in their efforts to rebuild their religious life in Judaea. For in the period during which the events of Purim occurred, the returned Jews, despite many obstacles, re-established Judaism in Judaea.

In the East, in Shushan, one of the capitals of the Persian Empire, a threat arose in the person of Haman. His attempt to destroy the Jews failed, just as the attempt of the Pharaohs to exterminate the Jews failed.

The deliverance from Egypt is celebrated with the Passover. The deliverance of the Shushan Jews is celebrated as Purim. And the first Purim, when it occurred, took place when the Temple was rebuilt and rededicated -- and Passover became the first Holy Day to be celebrated there. The Jews of Shushan marked their own Passover, Purim, and then, shortly after, they celebrated Passover.

It could be an accident of the calendar. But it could also be a reminder to the Jewish communities scattered throughout the world. They each have their own time of deliverance, Purim and together, all Jews mark a common time of deliverance, Passover.

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