

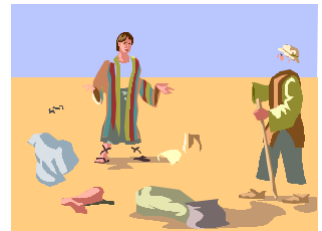
Passover History



Passover is a holiday that celebrates the escape of the Israelites from Egypt and slavery in approximately 1225 B.C.E., and the 'passing over' of their homes by the Angel of Death sparing their first born. Passover starts on 14th day of Nisan, the first month of the Jewish calendar, which usually occurs between April and May of the modern calendar.

According to the Hebrew Bible, Jewish settlement in ancient Egypt first occurred when Joseph, a son of Jacob, moved his family there. The Israelites lived in harmony in the province of Goshen and for many generations enjoyed the protection of the Pharaohs, but as their population grew the Egyptians began to see them as a threat.

Eventually the Egyptian Pharaoh enslaved the Hebrews, forcing them to do back breaking labor, building cities and homes for him, without pay. According to the book of Exodus, he also tried to destroy the Israelite population by ordering all male infants to be killed at birth.



Moses was saved from this death by his mother and sister. They put him in a basket and set it afloat on the river, hoping that whoever found the baby would



adopt him. His sister, Miriam, followed along as the basket floated away. The basket and Moses were found by the pharaoh's daughter. She took the baby home and raised him like a son. She named him Moses, "he who was drawn from the water."

When Moses grew up, he became aware of his true identity and the Egyptians' brutal treatment of his fellow Hebrews. He killed an Egyptian slave master and escaped to the desert, where he lived for forty years as a shepherd.

The Hebrews in Egypt remained in bondage. One day, as Moses was shepherding his flock, he came upon a burning bush, in which God appeared to him. God told Moses that he has been chosen to free the Hebrews from slavery and to lead them out of Egypt.



Along with his brother Aaron, Moses returned to Egypt and approached the reigning pharaoh several times, asking him to "Let my people go." The Pharaoh refused to let them go and even intensified the suffering of Israel. He increased the burden of labor on his Hebrew slaves.

Because of the Pharaoh's refusal to free the slaves, God began to send a series of plagues upon the Egyptians:

Blood - The waters of Egypt were turned to blood. All the fish died and the water became unusable. Frogs - Hordes of frogs swarmed the land of Egypt. Lice - Masses of lice invaded Egyptian homes and plagued the Egyptian people.



Wild Animals or Flies - Wild animals invaded Egyptian homes and land causing destruction.



Pestilence - Egyptian livestock were struck down with disease. Boils - The Egyptian people were plagued by painful boils that covered their bodies.

Hail - Severe weather destroyed Egyptian crops and beat down upon them.

Locusts - Locusts swarmed Egypt and ate any remaining crops and food.



Darkness - Darkness covered the land of Egypt for three days.

During every plague the Pharaoh would be afraid and promise to let the Hebrews go. As soon as God would lift the plague, he would go back on his word and refuse to free the Hebrews from slavery.



The tenth plague was the death of the first born of each family. Moses instructed the Hebrews to slaughter lambs and spread their blood over their front doors so that the Angel of Death would pass over their homes, leaving their

children unharmed. From this act came Pesach, the Hebrew word for “passing over.”

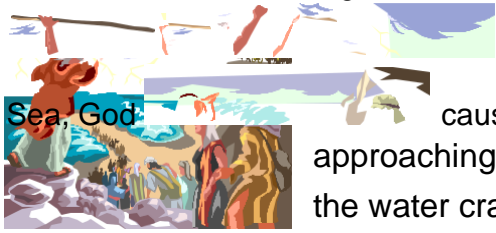
The death of the firstborn finally broke the Pharaoh's resistance and he reluctantly agreed to let Moses lead his people out of Egypt and into the Promised Land.

Fearful that the Pharaoh would change his mind, the Israelites left as quickly as possible, so quickly that there is no time for their dough to rise, and the only provisions they took along were unleavened.



Today, during Passover week, only bread that is unleavened is eaten. Passover is sometimes called the Festival of Unleavened Bread.


The Pharaoh did change his mind and sent his army to retrieve the former slaves.



When the Moses and his followers reached the Red

Sea, God

caused the waters part so that they could escape the approaching Egyptian army. When the soldiers tried to follow, the water crashed down on them and they all drowned.

The story of the Hebrews deliverance from slavery is remembered during Passover week with a meal called the Seder. During the meal, the story of the exodus from Egypt is read aloud from a special text called the  Haggadah and rituals corresponding to various



aspects of the story are performed.

