

Passover

The feast of Passover, one of the most important Jewish festivals, will next be celebrated by Jews all around the world from **8th to 16th April 2020**.

Known as Pesach in Hebrew, Passover has been celebrated since about 1300 BC with families often travelling great distances to celebrate together. The celebration lasts for seven or eight days depending on where you live.



The Story of Passover

The Book of Exodus in the Old Testament of the Bible tells the story of Passover. The people of Israel had been slaves in Egypt for over 400 years. Although God promised he would release them from slavery, it seemed that the Pharaoh (the king of Egypt) had other ideas! When Moses was a very old man, he and his brother Aaron visited Pharaoh and demanded, in the name of God, that he let their people go. Pharaoh refused, claiming that he did not recognise God. Moses warned him that God would send ten plagues to Egypt to show his power.

- First came the **Plague of Blood**. The River Nile was essential for Egyptian life, so when God turned the water of the River Nile, and all the water of Egypt, into blood, the fish and crops died and the Egyptian people suffered terribly.
- Second came the **Plague of Frogs**: Can you imagine if everything was covered in frogs? It sounds funny but I expect it wasn't very nice! We have a Plague of Frogs colouring page, below.
- After the frogs, came the third plague, the **Plague of Lice**. Everything and everyone was covered in creepy crawly itchy lice.
- Fourth came the **Plague of Flies**. Flies swarmed into Egypt in huge numbers and got everywhere!
- After the flies came the fifth plague, the **Plague on Livestock**. All of Egypt's animals - horses, donkeys, camels, cows, sheep and goats - died. Egyptians began to be very hungry.
- Next God sent a **Plague of Boils**. Boils are very painful infected spots, and the people of Egypt and all their livestock were covered with them.
- Can you imagine things getting worse? After the boils came the seventh plague, the **Plague of Hail**, with a huge hailstorm which

flattened down any surviving crops. The hail stones were so big that they killed people and animals!

- Eighth came the **Plague of Locusts**. Locusts swarmed into Egypt and munched up any crops which were still standing, leaving nothing behind them.
- After that, for the ninth plague, the people of Egypt were terrified by the **Plague of Darkness**. The sun disappeared and for three full days Egypt went dark.

All these plagues affected only the Egyptians. God protected Moses' people and the Israelites were unaffected. Pharaoh, however, still refused to budge, so God sent his final, terrible plague:

- The Tenth Plague - the **Plague on the First-born**. God told Moses that one of his angels would go from house to house and kill every Egyptian first-born son! To save Israelite children from the same fate, Moses should tell his people to follow some very specific instructions: to kill a lamb and use its blood to make a mark on their doors, then to roast and eat the lamb with bitter herbs and unleavened (flat) bread, while dressed for a journey.

Sure enough, at midnight the angel went through Egypt and every first born son was struck down, including Pharaoh's son. The Israelite households were ***passed over*** (which is where the name of this holiday comes from). The people of Egypt were terrified and called on Pharaoh to banish the people of Israel right away, which he did. In fact, the Israelites left in such a hurry that there wasn't time for their bread dough to rise, which is why no risen (leavened) bread is eaten during Passover now. Moses led the people out of Egypt.

Preparing for Passover

First comes cleaning! Every tiny speck of leaven (chametz) must be removed from the house before celebrations begin. Children join in.

The day before Passover, first born sons fast to remember the Plague of the Firstborn.

On the first two nights of Passover, families and friends gather together to celebrate with a ritual *seder* meal. Special plates and cutlery are used, specific food is eaten, and fifteen steps are observed in order, including eating matzah (unleavened bread) and bitter herbs, drinking four cups of wine or grape juice, reciting the Haggadah (the story of the Exodus from Egypt). The youngest child asks four special questions and the father answers. Sometimes a piece of matzah is broken off and hidden for the children to search for.



Matzo and seder plate