

CHILDREN

Maggid

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We now tell the story of Passover. I made it very brief so we don't have to sit around whining about not getting food yet.

At the end of the biblical book of Genesis, Joseph brings his family to Egypt. Over the following centuries, the descendants of Joseph's family (the Hebrews) become so numerous that when a new king comes to power he fears what might happen if the Hebrews decide to rise against the Egyptians. He decides that the best way to avoid this situation is to enslave them (Exodus 1). According to tradition, these enslaved Hebrews are the ancestors of modern day Jews.

Despite pharaoh's attempt to subdue the Hebrews they continue to have many children. As their numbers grow, pharaoh comes up with another plan: he will send soldiers to kill all newborn male babies who were born to Hebrew mothers. This is where the story of Moses begins.

Moses

In order to save Moses from the grisly fate pharaoh has decreed, his mother and sister put him in a basket and set it afloat on the river. Their hope is that the basket will float to safety and whomever finds the baby will adopt him as their own. His sister, Miriam, follows along as the basket floats away. Eventually it is discovered by none other than pharaoh's daughter. She saves Moses and raises him as her own, so that a Hebrew child is raised as a prince of Egypt.

When Moses grows up he kills an Egyptian guard when he sees him beating a Hebrew slave. Then Moses flees for his life, heading into the desert. In the desert he joins the family of Jethro, a Midian priest, by marrying Jethro's daughter and having children with her. He becomes a shepherd for Jethro's flock and one day, while out tending the sheep, Moses meets God in the wilderness. The voice of God calls out to him from a burning bush and Moses answers: "Hineini!" ("Here I am!" in Hebrew.)

God tells Moses that he has been chosen to free the Hebrews from slavery in Egypt. Moses is not sure he can carry out this command. But God reassures Moses that he will have help in the form of God's aide and his brother, Aaron.

The Ten Plagues

Soon afterward, Moses returns to Egypt and demands that pharaoh release the Hebrews from bondage. Pharaoh refuses and as a result God sends ten plagues upon Egypt: 1. Blood - The waters of Egypt are turned to blood. All the fish die and water becomes unusable. 2. Frogs - Hordes of frogs swarm the land of Egypt. 3. Gnats or Lice - Masses of gnats or lice invade Egyptian homes and plague the Egyptian people. 4. Wild Animals - Wild animals invade Egyptian homes and lands, causing destruction and wrecking havoc. 5. Pestilence - Egyptian livestock is struck down with disease. 6. Boils - The Egyptian people are plagued by painful boils that cover their bodies. 7. Hail - Severe weather destroys Egyptian crops and beats down upon them. 8. Locusts - Locusts swarm Egypt and eat any remaining crops and food. 9. Darkness - Darkness covers the land of Egypt for three days. 10. Death of the Firstborn - The firstborn of every Egyptian family is killed. Even the firstborn of Egyptian animals die.

The tenth plague is where the Jewish holiday of [Passover](#) derives its name, because while the Angel of Death visited Egypt it "passed over" Hebrew homes, which had been marked with lambs blood on the doorposts.

The Exodus

After the tenth plague pharaoh relents and releases the Hebrews. They quickly bake their bread, not even pausing for the dough to rise, which is why Jews eat matzah (unleavened bread) during Passover.

Soon after they leave their homes pharaoh changes his mind and sends soldiers after the Hebrews, but when the former slaves reach the Sea of Reeds the waters part so that they can escape. When the soldiers try to follow them, the waters crash down upon them. According to Jewish legend, when the angels began rejoicing as the Hebrews escaped and the soldiers drowned God reprimanded them, saying: "My creatures are drowning, and you're singing songs!" This midrash (rabbinic story) teaches us that we should not rejoice in the sufferings of our enemies. (Telushkin, Joseph. "Jewish Literacy." pgs 35-36).

Once they have crossed the water, the Hebrews begin the next part of their journey as they search for the Promised Land. The story of [Passover](#) recounts how the Hebrews gained their freedom and became the ancestors of the Jewish people.