

How Did the Israelites Wind Up in Egypt in the First Place?

Contributed by [JQ International](#)

Source: JQ International GLBT Haggadah

According to the Book of Exodus, there was a famine in the land of Canaan (later known as Israel). Because of this famine, the Hebrew patriarch Jacob traveled with his extended family of 70 to Egypt to both live in better conditions and be with his son Joseph. Joseph's wisdom had impressed the Pharaoh of Egypt to the point that he was appointed Viceroy of Egypt, which was second in power only to the Pharaoh.

The next 430 years in Egypt saw the Israelites prosper and rapidly multiply to about 3 million people. These numbers were so great, the Pharaoh became nervous that the Israelites were becoming too many in number to control and thought they might side with Egypt's enemies in case of war. The Pharaoh decreed that the Israelites should be enslaved to build cities and roads for him so that they would be too tired and also would not have time to have children. The Israelites were then confined to the land area of Goshen (Hebrew meaning of Goshen: "approaching" or "drawing near," meaning the Israelites were possibly drawn closer to God during this period of time in Goshen, hence the essence of the Passover story occurred here), which was the fertile land that was east of the Nile delta and west of the border of Canaan.

As slaves, the lives of our ancestors were embittered and our Seder plate symbolically represents their lives under bondage.