

The Story of the Exodus

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Source:

Round Robin Reading:

Many Jews begin the story of Passover by recounting the story of Joseph. How Joseph's older brothers sold him as a slave to Midianite merchants on their way to Egypt. In Egypt, Joseph interpreted the dreams of the Pharaoh, gained respectability, power and wealth for himself and encouraged Hebrews to migrate to Egypt.

After Joseph's death subsequent rulers changed their policies, regarded the Hebrews as foreigners, and feared the rapid growth in their number as a threat to the security of government. The pharaohs reduced the Hebrews to slavery, creating oppression and immense suffering among them. However, the most familiar story of Passover commences several hundred years after the death of Joseph. The traditional story of Passover begins with the birth of Moses, the son of Amram and Yocheved.

At the time Moses was born, the pharaoh, in fear of continued increased growth in the Hebrew slave population, ordered the death of all male Hebrew babies. At birth, Moses was hidden by his older sister, Miriam, and his older brother, Aaron. However when it was apparent that Moses would soon be killed, he was placed in a small basket and hidden among the reeds in the shallow waters of the Nile. Moses was soon found by the Pharaoh's daughter who took him in, and adopted him as her own. Miriam, seeing the pharaoh's daughter find Moses, suggested to the pharaoh's daughter that she get a Hebrew woman to nurse and rear him. The Hebrew woman selected to raise Moses was none other than his real mother, Yocheved.

Although the Book of Exodus is silent concerning the boyhood of Moses, the career of Moses generally falls into three periods of 40 years each. The first period was the years of training and preparation in Egypt. The second period was spent in the land of Midian. The third period was the return of Moses to Egypt and the freeing of the Jews from Egyptian bondage and bringing them to the land God promised.

When Moses was 40 years old, he saw an Egyptian beating a slave. In anger, Moses slew the Egyptian and was forced to flee to the wilderness of Midian, an area in the Sinai Peninsula, desolate and barren. In Midian, Moses became a shepherd, married Tziporah, the daughter of Yitro, the priest of Midian, and had two sons.

For 40 years Moses lived the quiet life of a shepherd, learning the ways of the desert tribes, the sources of food and water and becoming familiar with the land through which he would later lead the Hebrews in their flight of freedom from bondage. The years in the wilderness of Midian were brought to an end in an experience near Mt. Horeb.

While tending his flock, Moses saw a bush burning with fire, but was puzzled to discover that it was not being consumed. It was at this holy place of the burning bush where God first spoke to Moses telling him to return to Egypt and to deliver his people from bondage. With these words, Moses left Midian to return to Egypt.

On his return to Egypt, Moses found that the Hebrews had lost consciousness of their race, and their confidence had been nearly destroyed by the many years of servitude. Moses, with the help of Aaron, immediately began to build up the Hebrews' morale and to persuade them that they could, and must, leave Egypt.

Even though Moses was eventually able to persuade the Hebrews to leave Egypt, he was still faced with the problems of persuading the pharaoh to allow them to leave. Once Moses established his leadership among the Hebrews, he then appeared before pharaoh, seeking his consent for the Hebrews to leave Egypt. Pharaoh not only refused, but he ordered the taskmasters to increase the work requirement of the Hebrew slaves.

In order to overcome the resistance of the pharaoh, God, through Moses, delivered ten plagues to the people of Egypt. With the coming of each plague, the pharaoh gave his consent for the Hebrews to leave; however, when the plague was stayed, the pharaoh changed his mind until a more severe pestilence was sent.

(Spill out of the cup one drop of wine while saying each of the ten plagues)

Question for discussion: Why do we spill our a drop of wine at each plague?