

The Passover Story

For 2-5 year olds:

A long time ago there was a mean king called Pharaoh. In his land, all Jewish people* were slaves. They had to do everything Pharaoh said and they had to work very hard.

A good man named Moses told Pharaoh that God would send bad things called plagues as punishment for making the Jews be his slaves. The only way to stop the punishment was to let the Jews be free, but Pharaoh said no. The first plague or punishment was that God made the water turn to blood. Then God sent frogs, bugs, and lots of terrible things to the land. God made all the cows get sick and sent terrible storms. Finally, it was too much for Pharaoh and he finally set the Jewish slaves free. The Jews had to leave quickly and they had to take their bread out of the oven before it was ready.

At Passover, Jews eat matzah and other special foods to remember when they were slaves and became free.

For 6-9 year olds:

A long time ago in a country called Egypt, a mean king called Pharaoh ruled the land. Pharaoh worried that the Jewish people would try to rule, so he made a law that all Jewish people would be his slaves. One Jewish mother, to keep her new baby from slavery, put him in a basket by the river. The Pharaoh's daughter found him there and raised him as her own. The baby's name was Moses. For many years, Pharaoh kept the Jews as slaves but one day, God spoke to Moses and told him that he had to tell Pharaoh to let the Jews go.

Pharaoh said no, but Moses warned him that God would send bad things called plagues to Egypt as punishment. He still said no, so first, the water was turned to blood. Then God sent frogs, lice, and flies. He made all the cattle get sick. He sent boils or sores, terrible hailstorms, locusts, darkness, and finally, began killing all the oldest children in each Egyptian family. [The Jewish people were "passed over" and their children were not killed. That's why the holiday is called Passover!]

Finally, the Pharaoh had enough and let the slaves free. They had to leave quickly before Pharaoh changed his mind, so they packed what they could and took all their bread out of the oven before it was ready. When they reached the sea, Moses stretched his arm out and the waters split apart so the Jews could cross to freedom! On the other side, Miriam, Moses' sister, played her timbrel [tambourine] to celebrate their escape and each year at Passover, Jews eat special foods and retell the story to remember the time when they were slaves in Egypt and found their way to freedom.

For ages 10+

A long time ago in Egypt, Pharaoh ruled over all the Egyptians and the Jewish people, who lived in a part of Egypt called Goshen. Pharaoh was cruel and fearful and he worried that the Jews would rise up and fight him and so he made a law that all Jewish baby boys should be killed and all the Jewish people would be his slaves. One new mother, afraid for her baby's life, put him in a basket by the river so he wouldn't be killed. That baby was named Moses. His sister, Miriam, followed him down to the river to watch over him and make sure he was safe until she saw that a woman, the Pharaoh's daughter, picked him up and took him home to raise him as her own.

As Moses grew, he knew the way the Pharaoh treated the Jewish people was wrong, so he left the Pharaoh's palace and became a shepherd. One day, when he was tending his sheep, he heard the voice of God telling him that he had to go back to Egypt and demand that the Pharaoh free the Jewish slaves. So, Moses did just that.

Pharaoh did not want to let the Jewish people go, though. He wanted to keep them as his slaves. Moses warned him that God would send plagues as punishment, and when he still refused, the plagues began. First, water was turned to blood. Then God sent frogs, lice, and flies. He made all the cattle get sick. He sent boils or sores, terrible hailstorms, locusts, darkness, and finally, began killing all the firstborn children. In order to protect their babies, Jews painted the blood of a lamb over their doorposts so the angel of death would "pass over" their homes. [That's why the holiday is called *Passover!*]

Finally, Pharaoh relented and agreed to set the Jewish slaves free. They knew they had to hurry and leave before he changed his mind, so they packed what they could, took all their bread out of the oven before it had risen, and fled.

As predicted, Pharaoh *did* change his mind and as the Jews neared the sea, the army was close behind. The Jews didn't know how they were going to escape, but just then, Moses stretched his arm out over the sea and the waters parted, allowing the Jews to cross. Once they were across, the waters spilled back down, trapping the Pharaoh's army.

When the Jews got to the other side, Miriam, Moses' sister, played her timbrel [tambourine] to celebrate their escape as they set off to find their new homeland. Each year at Passover, Jews eat special foods and retell the story to remember the time when they were slaves in Egypt and found their way to freedom.

*The terms *Hebrews*, *Israelites*, and *Jews* are often used interchangeably, but they can have slightly different meanings depending on the context. Many times, the story of Passover is told using the words *Hebrews* or *Israelites*, which tend to have more historical implications. In this toolkit, we use the word *Jews* and/or the *Jewish people*, which is more accessible to children and encompasses both the religious and ethnic dimensions of the Jewish people.