



# Passover

## What is Passover?

Passover or Pesach in Hebrew is a Jewish festival marking the Exodus from Egypt, celebrating freedom from slavery. The festival is also known as The Spring Festival, Festival of Freedom, and by its Hebrew name of Pesach.

Passover starts on the evening of the 15<sup>th</sup> day of the Jewish month of Nissan, which corresponds to March or April in the Gregorian calendar. This year the Seder or special meal of the start of Passover is on Wednesday evening of 5<sup>th</sup> to the 13<sup>th</sup> April 2023. Passover is one of the three pilgrimage festivals in the Jewish calendar, where in the times of the Temple, the whole population would journey to Jerusalem, and therefore is considered one of the major Jewish festivals.

## How is Passover celebrated?

On the first night of Passover, Jews all over the world have a special meal called Seder (means Order), when they read the Haggadah (telling of the story of slavery in Egypt, the 10 plagues brought on by God, and Moses leading the Israelites out of slavery).

During the reading of the Haggadah, following a specific order, certain symbolic food items are eaten. They symbolise the harsh life of slaves and tears they would have shed (bitter herbs, dipped in salt water), Charoset (a sweet mix with a consistency and appearance that reminds of the mortar used for building the Pyramids), hardboiled eggs symbolising new beginnings for the Israelites as free from bondage, and alluding to Passover being in the spring time.

The festival of Passover is observed for 7 days by Jews in Israel and by Progressive Jews in the Diaspora, whereas Orthodox Jews outside of Israel celebrate for 8 days. During this time, Jews eat Matzah (unleavened bread); because when the Israelites fled from Egypt, they did so in a hurry and did not have time to wait for the bread to rise. The youngest child asks important questions, such as “why is this night different from all other nights?”

## What is the relevance of Passover now?

Passover is an opportunity to put ourselves in the shoes of the slaves, to try to imagine their suffering. To realise that currently, while we are enjoyed freedom of speech and freedom of religion, there are still people all over the world who are subjected to forced labour or war. Passover highlights issues of social justice that we should engage with.

The Seder meal culminates with the expression of “Next Year in Jerusalem”. The name of the city of Jerusalem contains the root letters of the word Shalom, Peace in Hebrew. The message is a literal wish to make Passover in the homeland next year, and that we hope to have Peace for everyone soon. A relevant message as we witness the war in Ukraine, refugees from Syria and Afghanistan seeking safety, the Uyghurs in labour camps in China and so on.

## Main characters

God, Moses, Aaron, the Israelites - descendants of Jacob (also known by the name Israel).

## Women who played important roles

Yocheved (mother of Moses), Shiphrah and Puah (the two midwives), Miriam (sister of Moses), The Princess (daughter of king Pharaoh).

